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The Guiding Hand: An Exploration of the Evolution and Importance of the Producer in the Finnish Game Industry

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<p>This thesis aims to shed light on and introduce the role of the producer to students, specifically at Metropolia in the game major. Based on personal classroom experience at Metropolia, as both a teacher and a student, teams tend to tackle new projects with only an idea in mind and rarely have a producer at the helm and, when they do, they fail to utilise them effectively. The position and the very idea of a producer can be unclear to many students. As they will go on to work under and alongside producers in the industry (or become ones themselves), it is hoped that this priming will result in more ownership and clear teamwork at school while better preparing students for the road ahead.</p> <p>In an effort to highlight the importance of the producer on the micro level, the thesis begins by examining the subject on a macro level, sifting through the history of the game industry in Finland to show how it has matured and how current industry positions have evolved, namely that of the producer. By conveying the history and importance of this position in industry work, the hope is that the need for this position in a more formalised role in all group projects at Metropolia will become all the more apparent and that the in-depth look at the profession, including interviews from industry producers, will provide students with invaluable insight.</p> <p>This thesis will be limited in scope to practices in Finland and how the role of producer functions there with an aim to educate and inform Finnish students. As a result of this study, a Producer Guidelines-PDF, introducing the producer's duties and responsibilities was created and attached as an appendix. It can be distributed to students to guide them in approaching the role and achieving their goals in their team projects.</p>	
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<p>Insinööriyön tarkoituksena on valaista ja esitellä tuottajan roolia opiskelijoille, pääpainoisesti Metropolian pelisovellukset-pääaineen opiskelijoille. Henkilökohtaisen kokemuksen perusteella, sekä opettajana että opiskelijana, opiskelijaryhmät pyrkivät tekemään projekteja pelkän idean varassa, ja harvoin näissä projekteissa on tuottajaa mukana, ja jos on, häntä ei osata hyödyntää kunnolla. Tuottajan asema ja tehtävät ovat epäselvät monelle opiskelijalle. Kun opiskelijat työelämässä päätyvät työskentelemään tuottajien kanssa (tai jos heistä itsestään tulee tuottajia) ja heidän rinnallaan, on toivottavaa, että tämä opinnäyte-raportti johdtaa parempaan ryhmätyöskentelyyn opinnoissa, samalla kun se auttaa opiskelijoita valmistautumaan pelialalla työskentelyyn.</p> <p>Vaikka tuottajan merkitystä pyritään korostamaan mikrotasolla, opinnäyteraportissa tutkitaan aihetta makrotasolla, seulomalla Suomen peliteollisuuden historiaa, jotta selviää, kuinka ala on kypsynyt ja miten sen nykyiset roolit ovat kehittyneet, painottaen tuottajan roolia. Selvittämällä tämän roolin historiaa ja merkitystä alalla toivottavasti tämän roolin tarve ja potentiaalinen hyöty Metropolian ryhmäprojekteissa tulee entistä selvemmäksi. Tavoitteena on, että tuottajan työn syvällisempi tarkastelu, mukaan lukien pelialan tuottajien haastattelut, antaa opiskelijoille arvokasta ja hyödyllistä tietoa tuottajan roolista.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyö on rajattu koskemaan Suomen pelialan käytäntöjä ja tuottajan roolia siinä sekä tutustuttamaan opiskelijat tuottajan työnkuvaan. Insinööriyön osana luotiin Producer Guidelines -opas, jossa esitellään tuottajan tehtävät ja vastuut, sekä työkaluja, joilla hallinnoida ryhmäprojektia. Sitä voidaan jakaa opiskelijoille ohjaamaan heitä tutustumaan tuottajan rooliin ja saavuttamaan tavoitteensa ryhmäprojekteissa.</p>	
Avainsanat	tuottaja, tuottaminen, Suomen pelialan historia

Contents

List of Abbreviations

1	Introduction	3
2	History of the Finnish game industry	4
	2.1 The Commodore Era: 1980	4
	2.2 The Recession and the Rise: 1990	12
	2.3 The New Beginning: 2000	17
	2.4 The Maturing of the Industry: 2010	20
	2.5 Summary	23
3	The Interviews	25
4	Producing and Being a Producer	28
	4.1 Introduction	28
	4.2 What Makes a Producer?	29
	4.3 People Driven Producing	32
	4.4 Data Driven Producing	33
	4.5 The Path to Producing?	35
	4.6 Tools of the Trade	36
	4.7 Digital tools	36
	4.8 Physical Tools	37
	4.9 Frameworks	38
5	Conclusion	39
	References	41

Appendices

Appendix 1. Producer Guidelines for Students

Appendix 2. The Interviews

List of Abbreviations

Digital release	Releasing the game on a digital platform instead of a physical copy.
Game Jam	An event with the aim of making a game, that usually takes place over one weekend.
Crunch	A term to describe when a deadline is getting close, but the project is not in schedule, so the team has to work overtime every day for a considerable period of time.
PC	A personal computer is, essentially, a computer with multiple use case scenarios, with a price, capabilities and size that makes it approachable for personal use, instead of purely professional.
C64	The Commodore 64, a personal computer that was released in the early 1980s by Commodore International. One of the, if not the most sold computer model in the world.
WAP	Wireless Application Protocol, a standard for sending and receiving information over a wireless, mobile network. Published in 1999, it was a rudimentary way of reading websites on different mobile devices.
GaaS	Games as a Service, a revenue model that is a way of releasing video games, and specifically game content on a continuous basis. The idea being to be able to monetise on the games after the sale, but it is often used to support Free to Play games as well. Giving the games a far longer shelf life than a game using the one-time purchase monetisation.
HR	Human Resources, the management of employees in company, with the primary point is to protect the company and maximise the performance of workers and give the company and advantage over the competition.

1 Introduction

The history of the Finnish game industry is long and rich, although it is a shorter one for producers. For a long time, no formal title was dedicated for the role and all of the organisation oversight they now provide landed in the laps of those willing (and sometimes unwilling) and able to take on the challenges; it was a thankless job buried in the general chaos of making a game. Today, however, producers are considered a vital part of any game studio.

While this shift has occurred in the industry, it has yet to occur in the classroom. Game projects at Metropolia are built by programmers and, occasionally, bolstered by artists, however, there has yet to be formal recognition for a project producer. This is especially concerning when considering the importance of the position in the industry. The estimated amount of new positions in the Finnish game industry that will be opening between 2019 and 2020 is 500. [1] All of these positions will be working with producers (and quite a few as producers) in some capacity, which is why it is imperative that students acquire experience with not only the demands of the role but also how to work under the oversight of a producer.

Doing so will not only improve the quality of student projects, it will also prepare students for entering the industry, teaching them what to expect and how to work with their producers. The goal of this thesis is to better define and explore the skills and demands of the producer in the industry to highlight their importance and, in so doing, advocate for the need for the formalisation of the position in the classroom where the skills would not only be beneficial to current group projects, but also in bridging the gap between education and industry.

This thesis is divided into two sections: The first section examines the history of the game industry in Finland through the lens of a producer, including how and why the need for their skills was recognised and formalised, the second section examines their current role in the industry through cited research and four interviews with producers from every background and level of experience, from start-ups to major game studios, both junior to executive, to assess what skills and demands are currently relevant to the position. Finally, a Producer Guidelines-PDF will be attached that takes the information from this section and makes it easy to digest and accessible to the student; the most important information will be there in the hopes that teachers and students use the aide to incorporate the role into their team projects and better utilise the role when they do.

The final section ties everything together and examines the conclusions of the first two sections in the context of the classroom and how students might benefit from exposure to this field in their projects and how the skills and role of a producer might be better integrated into the current curriculum.

2 History of the Finnish game industry

2.1 The Commodore Era: 1980

The Finnish game industry sprung to life during the 80s, though, notably, as in the tradition established by Chesmac, a simple chess-game credited as the first official game made in Finland, in the hands of hobbyists. What really allowed them to flourish, however, was the new and newly accessible technology becoming available at the time.

During this time, the computer scene was dominated by Commodore-computers. In 1980 Commodore released the VIC-20 computer, the very first computer that was not only commercially successful globally, but in Finland as well. VIC stands for Video Interface Chip, named for the chip the computer was built around. Ironically, the chip had been designed with video game machines in mind but due to a lack of demand, the company repurposed the chip for the VIC-20, which would go on as a tool for game development.

Hot on the heels of the success of the VIC-20, Commodore outdid themselves shortly thereafter, in 1982, with the Commodore 64 (hereinafter referred to as C64), an even bigger commercial success than the VIC-20. Globally, scaling the sales data into proportion by population, the C64 sold the most in Finland when compared globally. [2] This could even be seen in the marketing campaigns, where it was dubbed “Tasavallan tietokone” (The Computer of the Republic). Its computing power well outstripped that of the VIC-20 and its SID-voice chip was among the best in the industry at the time.

Even before these new models, some games had been made, such as the aforementioned Chesmac, a passion project released in 1979 and developed by Raimo Suonio after he lost his job at KONE. However, these early games were very simple and the new Commodore computers allowed for more to be done. That combined with the widespread

access to both of these models in Finland, the average person was likely to have these (relatively) powerful computing tools well within reach.

Chesmac, in birthing the game of the industry in Finland, also, inadvertently, set a precedent in creation; video games at this time came from the average person, who made and developed games recreationally. Much of this was owed to the limitations of platform processing power at the time, and the fact that games didn't need more than one person to go from idea to reality, but it is still worth noting as this variable is one that changes drastically. In the simplicity, the lack of proper infrastructure for both playing and making games and the lack of financial potential at the time (Chesmac sold only 104 copies for 68 marks and the case studies below also show poor sales) meant that the industry as we know it was still very much in its infancy, almost barely an industry, until key transformations in this decade. [1]

The release of the VIC-20 and the C64 proved to be one of these transformations, due to the proliferation in Finland and the fact that these models allowed for more layered games, another important transformation came printed in the pages of Mikrobitti. The magazine published source codes sent in by hobby programmers, which anyone who bought the magazine could copy onto their computer in a programme that not only passed on knowledge but also laid the foundation of infrastructure for game makers and programmers to connect with. To incentivize their participants, MikroBitti arranged "Kuukauden ohjelma" (Program of the Month) contests where they awarded anywhere from 500 to 1 000 Finnish marks to the winners. [3] Players, however, had yet to be included in this space. See the cover of MikroBitti from 1984 below in Figure 1:



Figure 1. Cover of MikroBitti, Issue 1, 1984. [25]

Eventually, companies began to recognise the potential for involvement, too, and the beginnings of financial investment could be seen in spite of the clear setbacks. The first Finnish video game publisher, Amersoft, was founded in 1984 under the Amer-Tupakka (Amer-Tobacco) concern, which had been founded back in 1950. Amer-Tuppaka grew by diversifying its interests and Amersoft represented another new direction for the company. The first video games Amersoft released, and, consequently, the first corporate sponsored video games in Finland, were made by the brothers Simo and Juho Ojaniemi.

While this paper only examines the Ojaniemi brothers and a few other notable figures, the brothers' collaboration concisely serves to highlight a shift in the trend of game making in the 80s; as games grew more complex and ambitious in scope, it became more common that games would be made not only by a single person, but rather shared by two or three dedicated individuals. These teams were still too small and informal for current titles as we understand and use them in the industry today; for instance, designating someone with the responsibilities of a lead programmer/artist/designer would be unheard of, much less anything resembling a producer in an official capacity. Nevertheless, in this

decade we see the first steps toward a more organised approach and small, team-based game creation. Eventually, however, the same trends observed in this decade, namely, growing teams and ever complex games and game platforms, factored into the need for a producer at the wheel down the line.

To further illustrate how games evolved from the barebones efforts of the 1970s, here are the games that the brothers published through Amersoft:

Mehulinja (Juice Assembly Line) illustrated in figure 2, is a game where the player had to control a juice factory by filling and corking bottles, gluing labels onto them and lifting gates for dispersal.

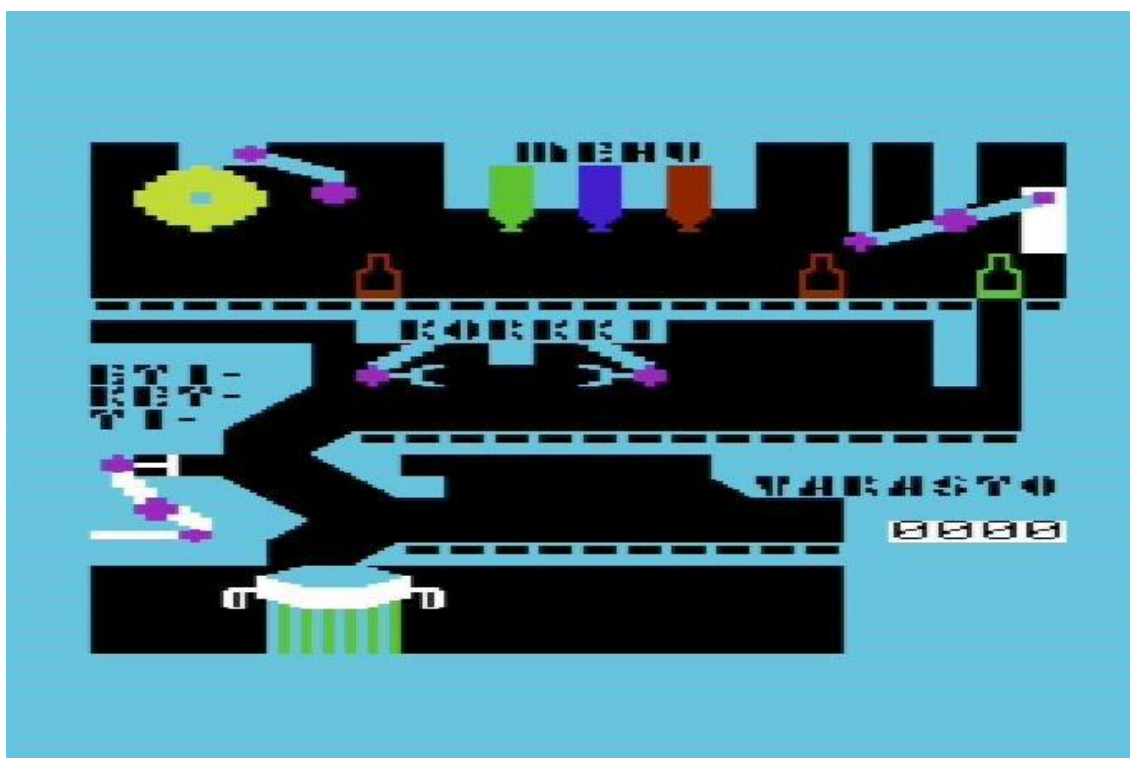


Figure 2. A screenshot of the game Mehulinja. [26]

Herkkusuu (Gourmet Eater) in figure 3, a game where the player played a frog and the main objective was to eat as many flies as possible.

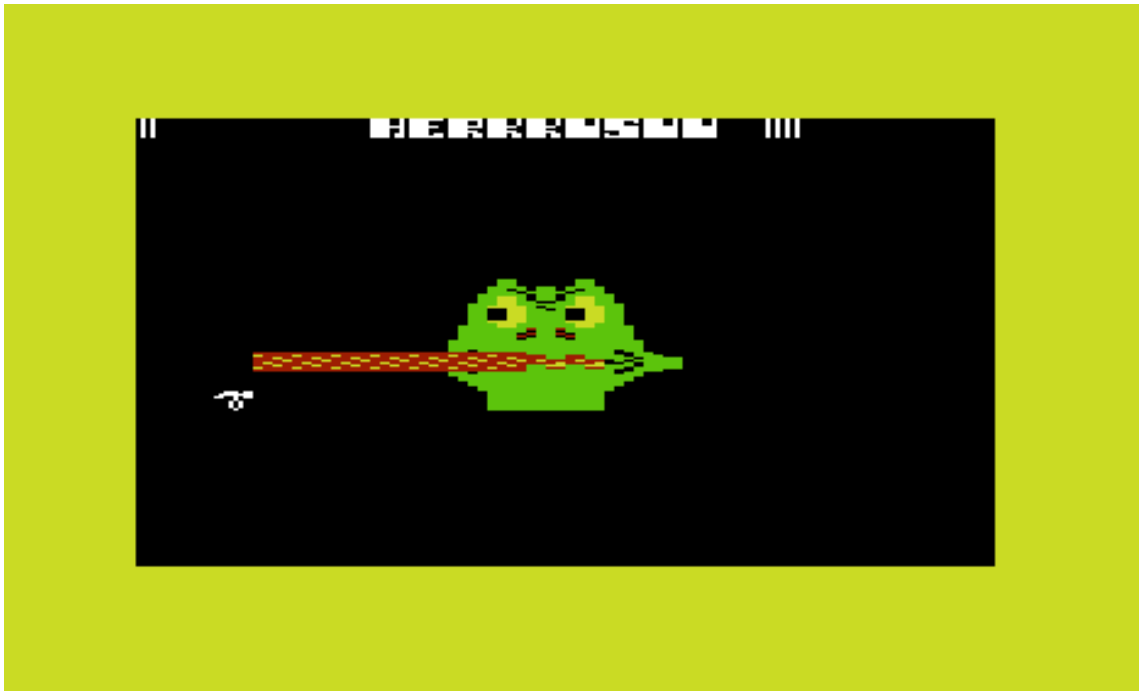


Figure 3. A screenshot of the game Herkkusuu. [27]

Myyräjahti (Mole Hunt) in figure 4, a game like *Whack-A-Mole*, where the player has to hit moles that pop up from their holes while avoiding the bombs jumping up from the same holes.



Figure 5. Screenshot from the game Myyräjahti. [28]

Raharuhtinas (Money Baron) in figure 5, a game where the player navigates through a maze of 2240 rooms, with the goal to escape with as much money as possible.



Figure 6. A screenshot from the game *Raharuhtinas*. Note the early and primitive 3D-effect. [29]

The brothers made 1 000 marks per game, with bonuses if they sold well, which they did not. Shortly after the release and less than enthusiastic reception of these games, the Ojaniemi brothers quit, leaving the game industry altogether. Amersoft continued without the brothers and also published the first licensed video game released in Finland, titled: “Uuno Turhapuro muuttaa maalle” (Uuno Turhapuro moves to the countryside). *Uuno Turhapuro* sold a little over 2 000 copies and there were plans for a sequel. This success was owed in part to the platform; while the games made by the Ojaniemi brothers were made for the VIC-20, *Uuno Turhapuro* was made for the C64 and, graphically, it stomped the brothers’ earlier efforts. Unfortunately, Amersoft declared bankruptcy in 1986, killing all further publishing plans, including the *Uuno Turhapuro* sequel. [4]

Finally, no history would be complete without the mentions of a few notable figures who advanced the industry through their work. Stavros Fasoulas made games for the C64 at a time when the Finnish industry was still incredibly sparse. Fasoulas recognised the greater opportunities to be found elsewhere, in England, which had a healthy and, more importantly, growing game industry. There, he worked on his own developing a game called *Sanxion* depicted in figure 6, which went on to become a commercial success and the first Finnish video game published abroad. Both milestone successes made Fasoulas famous within the game industry, both internationally and domestically, and put him on the map as a C64 game developer and, in Finland, earning the nickname “Pelialan Paavo Nurmi” (the Paavo Nurmi of the game industry). [5]



Figure 6. A screenshot of the game Sanxion. Note how the bottom shows a classic side scrolling point of view while the top shows the game from bird's eye view, giving the game a primitive pseudo-3D playstyle. [30]

Petrus Lehmuskoski also made quite a name for himself. During his time as an exchange student in the U.S., back in his highschool years, he discovered the world of video games and became an avid player. Once Lehmuskoski returned home, he quickly realised that nobody was importing video games to Finland, which led to him founding Toptronic in 1983, the first video game distributor in Finland. While Toptronic stands in the annals of Finnish game history on its own, Lehmuskoski's contributions did not end there. He understood the power of word of mouth and community and, as such, he also donated games as review material for magazines like C-lehti and MikroBitti, which provided a platform for developers to show off their new games and for players to hear about them. This made for, arguably, a more important contribution as it paved the way for unprecedented growth in the game industry; not only was the platform essentially marketing to an already interested base, but recognition motivated developers and hobbyists to keep making more games, leaving the industry with what looked like a promising start heading into the 1990s.

Worth noting that while tremendous growth and progress shook the industry at this time with the widespread availability of the C64 among hobbyist developers and the emergence of companies investing in games, the industry as a whole was still small and over the decade only saw roughly 10 000 000 marks in revenue (roughly valued at 2 651 879 € in October 2020). Additionally, large scale illegal copying of games and codes greatly diminished the industry, not only in Finland but globally. The fact that most games were made recreationally meant that patents and protections, let alone enforcing them, were not yet on the radar for these pet projects and, furthermore, as is often the case with new

and emergent technology and industries, not only was there not yet a body of laws specific to the industry that explicitly punished this kind of theft: at the time, it was not illegal to copy a game for your own use. It is impossible to accurately estimate how much pirating cost the gaming industry throughout the decade, but it is safe to say that the effects were significant. An example of this can be seen with Boulder Dash. Released in 1984 to great critical acclaim and notable commercial success, Boulder Dash was a popular game and proved to be just as popular in Finland as it was internationally. The problem? The game had not been officially released in Finland, so all the copies moving about in the country were illegally made. When the game was finally released in 1985, nearly all the copies remained unsold as most people already had the game. [6] And this was a game that found international success and acclaim; many local games in an infant industry simply would not be able to afford the hit illegal distribution would take.

Although these early days were characterised by the industry trying to find its legs upon which to stand, significant progress had been made. Looking back, we see the first steps towards a more organized approach as the growth in team sizes and the scale and scope of the games developed forced cooperation with others. Despite some setbacks and difficulty, the fledgling industry saw an emergence of interest, from corporations and consumers alike, and seemed poised to continue to flourish. As an example, below in figure 7 is the cover of C-lehti from 1988.



Figure 7. The cover of C-Lehti in 1988.

Note the bottom right corner mentioning eight games the magazine reviewed. [31]

2.2 The Recession and the Rise: 1990

Whatever promise the 80s seemed to hold, the 90s crushed; a large recession hit Finland, and led to the complete collapse of game publishing. Companies, in their attempts to stave off bankruptcy, were laying off workers, not hiring new ones, and games did not appear to be viable given the climate. Corporate interest, and investment, in the fledgling industry dried up.

Additionally, advancements in the field of computing compounded the effort and resources it took to make stellar games, thereby demanding more from developers who, recall, were largely hobbyists up until this point. While the recession rocked the market, the C64 lost its dominance, eclipsed by Amiga and the Personal Computer (hereinafter referred to as PC), both of which were much more complicated to program compared to the C64. Amiga was the next step forward for Commodore after the C64, and it sold well in Finland and abroad. However, even with this success, Amiga faced the same problem the C64 had in the previous decade: rampant illegal distribution. The games on this

platform were published on diskettes and, like the tapes the C64 used, were easy to copy. The rollover of this issue into the new generation of Commodore products proved disastrous for the company and, in 1994, Commodore filed for bankruptcy, marking the end of the Amiga and an era. [3] The PC rose to fill the void and quickly became the main platform for making and playing video games. As mentioned, programming on the PC took more skill, time and effort and the shift into the new generation of platforms necessitated a drastic change in the way games would need to be made and tackled. Gone were the days where it was reasonable for one person to come up with an idea, design it, program it and release it in a matter of months, only furthering the need for a team and, down the line, for a greater degree of specialisation within those teams. As a whole, the 90s were bleak for video games but there were a few bright spots. First, Pelit-lehti (Games-magazine) was founded in 1992 as a direct result of the decline of Commodore; C-lehti, the magazine for the industry at the time, saw lessened sales as the C64 lost prominence and the Amiga struggled in software sales and Pelit-lehti responded by broadening its approach, covering video games across platforms, regardless of whether they had been published for PC or Amiga. [6] See figure 8 below.



Figure 8. The cover of the first ever Pelit-magazine, January 1992. [32]

Pelit-lehti started hosting an event called KyöPelit-gaala (the name is a play on words so

it does not translate very well but a rough translation is the KyöGames Gala) where they celebrated the videogames chosen by the readers of the magazine. Later on Figma (the Finnish Games and Multimedia Association) started giving out platinum and gold awards at the event as well as reporting on how the Finnish game industry was growing. The KyöPelit-gaala finally grew so big that it was entirely turned over to Figma. Starting 2014, it became the Finnish Game Awards which is run by The Finnish Game Developers' Association. [7] The Finnish Game Awards has become a prestigious annual event where both the Finnish game industry and Finnish games and their makers are celebrated.

What game magazines needed to survive were readers and most importantly players and no scene held as many players as the demoscene did in the 1990s.

The demoscene is a community with a focus on the creating different kind of demos, which are artistic, creative real-time audiovisual experiences combining skillful programming, audio and graphics. This is where many, if not most, of the bigger Finnish game companies that are still around have their roots. The demoscene has had such a big impact on the Finnish game industry and culture that the Finnish Heritage Agency added the Finnish demoscene to the National Inventory of Living Heritage. [8]

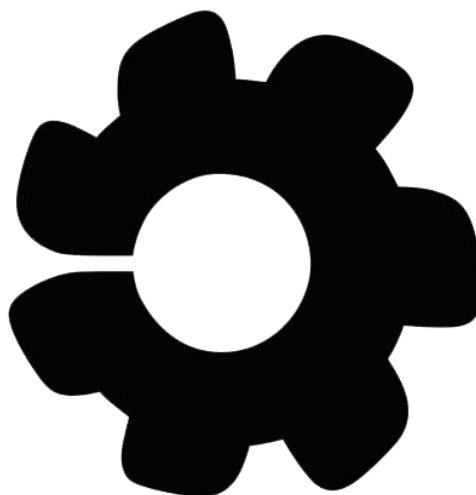
The origins of the demoscene can be found in pirated games, when crackers (those who cracked the protections on games for illegal distribution) wanted to leave their calling card and, to that end, they began using personal logos and art at the beginning of games they had cracked. This morphed slowly into more artistic and creative inserts, which eventually led to demos as we now recognise them. Due in part to the high concentration of Commodore products in Finland and the fact that many international games arrived late, Finland had an abnormally strong demoscene, and a logical extension of cracking games turned out to be making them. Most older and well known Finnish non-mobile game companies with a strong pedigree have their beginnings in the demoscene, such as Remedy Entertainment, Bugbear, Terramarque and Bloodhouse. See figure 9 below.



Figure 9. The logos of Terramarquen and Bloodhousen. [33, 34]

Of these, Bloodhouse released Stardust, a shoot 'em up game (a genre where the player has to continually dodge enemy fire whilst volleying back with their own) that was well received by both critics and consumers and enjoyed commercial success. Specifically, the game was praised for its cutting-edge graphics.

Terramarque, which was founded by two men, one of whom was the aforementioned Stavros Fasoulas, released a game called Elfmania, an elven fighting game. Unlike Stardust, the game failed commercially and was not well received in reviews. After this blow, Terramarque hit the ground running on a new, ambitious project but bad luck continued to dog them; with Commodore going bankrupt, they lost their platform and were forced to cancel the project. Here, Fasoulas hung up his hat and, defeated, retired from the game industry altogether. Terramarque found itself in dire straits, in stark contrast to Bloodhouse. As it turned out, the people in these two companies knew each other from the demoscene days and decided a merger would benefit all. Thus, in 1995 emerged Housemarque, one of the oldest and most established names within the Finnish game industry as illustrated in figure 10.



HOUSEMARQUE

Figure 10. Terramarque and Bloodhouse fused and became Housemarque. [35]

1995 also saw the founding of Remedy, another titan in the Finnish game industry. Remedy released their debut game, Death Rally, to positive reviews and acclaim. They became an instant hit, making it possible for the company to move out of the CEO's parents' garage and onto greater success. See figure 11.

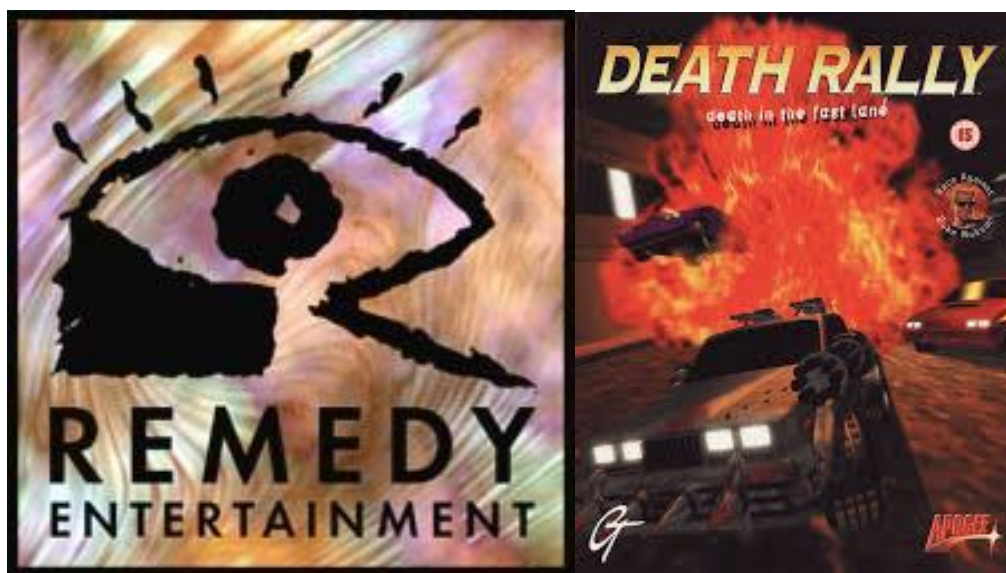


Figure 11. Remedy Entertainment and their first game, Death Rally. [36, 37]

The 1990s marked the first time when making games was approached in a more serious and professional manner. Much like the leap from the 1970s to the 1980s saw the scope and the complexity of games grow significantly, the leap from the 1980s to the 1990s saw the industry take further strides forward with development teams growing, the founding of several key companies and mergers among them taking place. And with

professionalism and more complex platforms to mirror greater ambition came the first steps toward specialisation within companies and the teams themselves. During this decade, games now had graphics artists, programmers, and designers, though, crucially, no producers yet. The job and the work of producers still needed doing, but a formal title and position had yet to be established. Instead, what is now the responsibility of the producers was often left in the hands of whoever happened to be the lead of the project. Nevertheless, with hindsight, we can clearly see this is where the role, and eventually the need, of a producer originated.

2.3 The New Beginning: 2000

An unexpected success rocked the start of the 2000s for the Finnish game industry. That success was named Max Payne (see figure 12) and was released in 2001. It shook the industry, particularly in Finland, where it became a cultural phenomenon, partially because it became ubiquitously popular and sold half a million copies in the first six months, a feat unheard of for a Finnish game. The game had been showcased on YLE news (the official Finnish Broadcasting Company) and many articles were published discussing both the game and the company that made it, Remedy. As if that were not enough coverage for an industry that, until then, had only really seen coverage in niche magazines, radio reviews and reviews were also made discussing the success.



Figure 12. The cover of Max Payne. [38]

The next big step for the industry was outside the realm of computers. Right alongside the PC and consoles, mobile phones developed and, as they did, became a platform themselves, giving rise to a formidable industry. This explosive rise was made possible by the creation of the Wireless Application Protocol (hereinafter referred to as WAP), a joint venture undertaken by Nokia, Ericsson, Motorola and Unwired Planet in 1998 to create a standardised protocol for the emerging mobile network. [9] As the first attempt at creating a working infrastructure for mobile networks, it was burdened by problems: slow speeds, primitive design, difficult to use and limited by the mobile phones at the time.

Heedless of these setbacks, the first Finnish mobile game companies established themselves in the wake of WAP: Sumea, Mr. Goodliving, and Universomo (all of which grew considerably and would later on be sold to larger parenting companies). Each of these companies wrestled with the simplicity of mobile phones and the lack of a central distribution channel; in order to publish games, they needed to strike a deal with each mobile phone provider separately and in Europe alone there were over a hundred.

A solution would, of course, and from a surprising source. Nokia wanting to tap into the game market and bypass the aforementioned issues, they made the bold decision to design a phone specifically for gaming and released the N-Gage, in 2003, their attempt to do just that. This serves to succinctly highlight the clear promise companies and

developers alike saw in the mobile phone as a platform. The phone, while an admirable undertaking, failed to deliver on the concept and was plagued by a different set of issues. To make a phone call it had to be used sideways and held like a taco; changing the game cartridge required removing the battery, effectively shutting down the whole phone; and worst of all, it had an unforgivably limited amount of games on offer. Because of all of this, the N-Gage sold poorly.

The following year Nokia tried again, updating the N-Gage and releasing the new version as the N-Gage QD, which fixed most of the issues found in its predecessor and retailed at a cheaper price, but, unfortunately, it proved to be too little, too late. The N-Gage QD flopped and became another financial failure. See figure 13 below.



Figure 13. Nokia's N-Gage and N-Gage QD. [39, 40]

Most importantly, when Nokia faced heavy layoffs, all the know-how which came from Nokia flooded into the industry. All of Nokia's work with not only the knowledge of mobile networks starting with the WAP but also the limitations and possibilities of mobile gaming was suddenly accessible and provided fertile ground for the Finnish mobile game industry to blossom.

At the same time others were trying to figure out a solution to an easier publishing method for games. In 2003, the U.S.-based company, Valve, created Steam, one of the first digital marketplaces for games on the PC. While it was not the first one ever, it was the first one that everyone can agree succeeded. Within its first four years, Steam gained over 13 million users. [10] For game developers this was a fundamental shift, since selling games at physical stores left developers with only 10% of the revenue, whereas digital publishing meant that developers could earn as much as 30% of that.

Crucially for the mobile market, Apple and Google came out with their own digital marketplaces for mobile applications in 2008, the App Store and Google play, respectively. Finally, mobile game developers had what they had been asking for: a centralised

distribution channel for mobile games. In Finland this proved to be especially important, as it allowed Finnish games to reach a wider audience; at long last, mobile developers no longer needed to reach out to every provider. The logistics of publishing transformed overnight, and the global reach of these digital marketplaces made distributing mobile games simple, easy and accessible.

These digital stores turned out to be crucial for the Finnish games to reach a wider audience. No longer did they have to worry about the logistics of getting their game published globally, since the digital marketplaces reached the whole world.

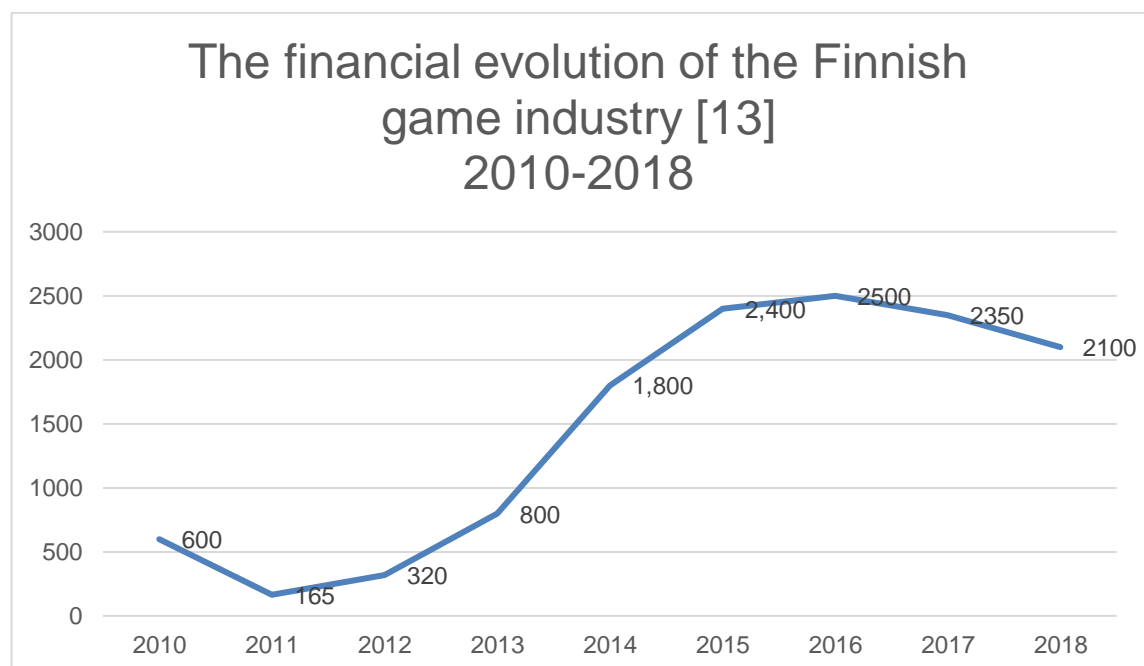
The 2000s saw the industry morph into a more recognisable structure, an obvious parent to the subsequent decade, most notably in how corporate the landscape had become. The industry progressed again, this time from the small teams of the 90s huddled in their parents' garage to seasoned publishers working from polished offices meant to accommodate the exploding team sizes that specialisation and ambition necessitated. This trend caught on by the late 90s and roles had become more common but there still existed quite a bit of ambiguity in these roles and expectations for them could vary wildly from company to company. Moreover, as industry standards had not been established yet, companies, employees and projects were still in the process of finding their form. It was in the 2000s when most of these companies cemented themselves as mainstays in the industry and began implementing a more rigid, professional approach. By now, there were structures in place in the companies, too, that finally began to resemble current ones, with various leads such as art, programming, design, marketing, QA testing, and, finally, proper producers. Producers became an official position in the industry. The team responsible for the aforementioned Max Payne made use of a producer, an outsider from a company Remedy worked with who lent their expertise to the project. As the 2000s progressed, however, producers were brought onto projects from the beginning and, more importantly, were picked from within the company, instead of either not having them or having them watch over the project from other companies.

2.4 The Maturing of the Industry: 2010

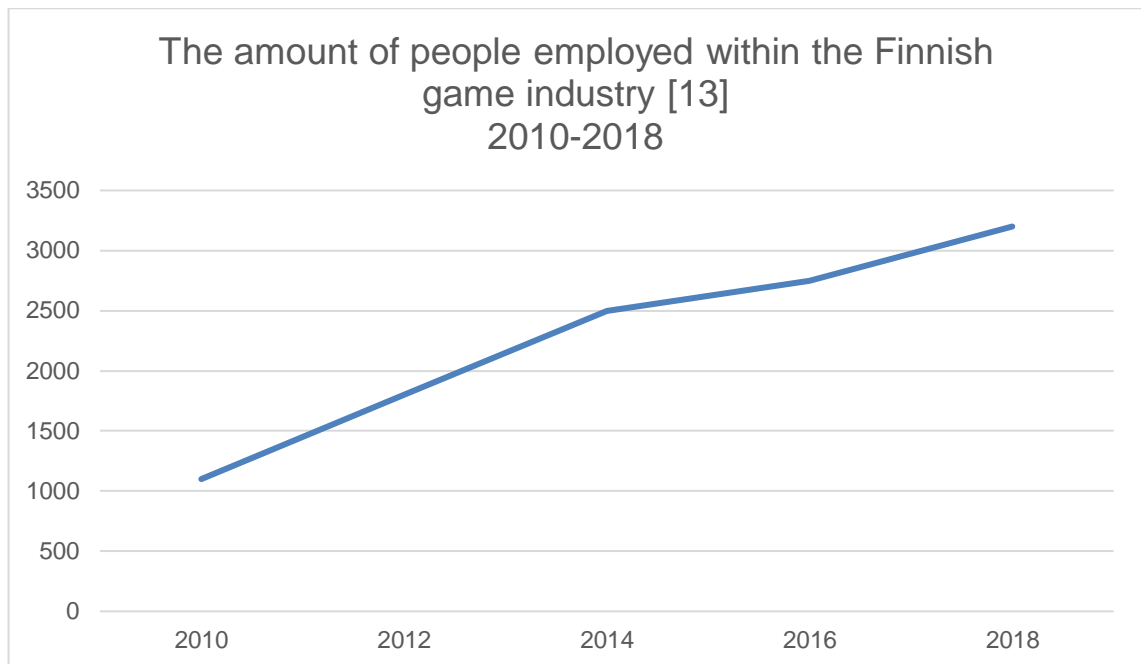
While in the 1990s and early 2000s most of the game developers were young hobbyists passionate about their work, by 2010 they had grown older, had children and families and, generally, shifted their priorities compared to the lifestyle of their youth. Naturally,

this shift reflected on the industry. The 2010s mark the era of the industry settling in, solidifying the precedence of professional priorities over purely creative endeavors. Increasingly games followed the Games as a Service (hereinafter referred to as GaaS) design philosophy. GaaS games, unlike traditional games, are never “finished”, rather, they are constantly updated and worked upon. A good example of this would be League of Legends, a 5 vs 5 multiplayer game released in 2009 that, true to form for the genre, 11 years later has still seen the addition of new playable characters, skins, events and more. Not only is it still alive, it is a highly profitable game with some of the biggest e-sports events in the world. The popularity of this model arises from the fact that it is more cost effective to focus attention on only a few games and keep tweaking those rather than investing in new ones. And, for similar reasons, similar to the trends in the film industry, companies also elected to produce many sequels, establishing franchises, and remaking games from previous decades, hoping to cash in on player nostalgia.

In spite of these choices, which have not always proven to be popular with the player-base, the 2010s have echoed previous decades and been a time of tremendous growth within Finland, as seen in the graphs 1 and 2.



Graph 1. The turnover within the Finnish game industry in the past decade, in millions of euros.



Graph 2. How many people the Finnish game industry employs.

To satisfy such explosive expansion, the Finnish game industry finds itself perpetually in need of skilled workers to a degree that the country alone cannot answer that need, which is why more companies are setting their sights on the global scale; in the 2000s companies turned to the global market to sell games, however, now, they would also have to recruit more actively talent from around the world or, better yet, offer training and reskilling opportunities. The realisation that education regarding the industry is important, along with steps taken to provide that education, is a true hallmark of this decade. Before, there simply was no way to study to become a game developer but within the, three universities, ten universities of applied sciences and four vocational schools now offer these studies. [13]

Universities:

- Helsinki, Aalto University
- Jyväskylä, University of Jyväskylä
- Tampere, University of Tampereen. Note, this is the only university in Finland- which offers a Master's program related to games.

Universities of Applied Sciences:

- The capital territory (pääkaupunkiseutu), Metropolia University of Applied Sciences
- Kokkola, Centria University of Applied Sciences
- Jyväskylä, University of Applied Sciences of Jyväskylä

- Kajaani, University of Applied Sciences of Kajaani
- Joensuu, Karelia University of Applied Sciences
- Outokumpu, Riveria Pelitalo University of Applied Sciences
- Oulu, University of Applied Sciences of Oulu
- Tampere, University of Applied Sciences of Tampere
- Turku, University of Applied Sciences of Turun
- Kotka, Kouvola, University of Applied Sciences of Southeastern-Finland

Vocational schools:

- Helsinki, Helsinki Vocational College and Adult Institute
- Suupohja, Vuoksi Vocational College
- Harjavalta, Huittinen, Kankaanpää, Kokemäki, Nakkila, Ulvila, Sataedu
- Kouvola, Vocational College of Kouvolan

The 2010s saw the industry had found its pace and place. No longer were there the same wild ambitions and out of the box-ideas from the 1990s and, to a certain degree, the 2000s, but carefully calculated investments designed to appeal to the widest audience. It would be harsh and, ultimately, untrue to say that the passion was out of the industry, especially since many within the industry still have a great deal of it. Rather, the rise of professionalism came with a rise in rigidity; profits became a higher priority more and creativity and experimentation for the sake of it became much rarer as a result. A more systematic and strategic approach makes sense in this context and in the context of the trends we've already seen: increased specialisation and splintering of jobs and titles, the complexity and of the games on the market, and the growing size of game studios producing them. Considering producership is leadership, coordination and bridging departments, employees from all the various departments in a studio, a producer is all but necessary for structure as they keep the pulse on progress and large projects moving forward.

2.5 Summary

The Finnish game industry has an interesting, versatile and multifaceted history, and, although producers have not been a part of it officially for very long, closer examination of the winding history shows their rise to prominence as almost an inevitability. Complexity, in games, job roles, companies, platforms, creates the need for organisation, and those to oversee it.

Producers have always existed in an unofficial capacity in any team, in the ones overseeing deadlines, keeping the team focused, cutting out and prioritising game content, (etc. put whatever else producers do here). As is often the case with softer skills, this work went unrecognised and shared between people informally, without them realising it. When games were friends or coworkers playing around in their parents' garage, organisation could be unstructured, especially when you consider that the industry had its roots in recreational creation. However, as the industry gained momentum and people and, consequently, corporations, took more notice, making games turned into a job, a division of entertainment that grew in budget as new platforms allowed for more ambitious projects and players clamoured for it. Soon, game studios became offices with departments (programmers, artists, designers, etc.) and communication across wide backgrounds, from gender, specialisation, location, age and structure to meet deadlines became not just important, but necessary.

This is where producers stepped in, now in an official capacity. The role is still more loosely defined when compared to others in the industry, however, generally, they enforce schedules, ensure that teams work together smoothly and, in general, deal with the loose ends of the job so the rest of the team can concentrate and feel supported in their specific role.

Given the trends and the figures of the industry, including a shared revenue of well over two billion euros and the steady rise of employees in the field, not to mention the global nature of this digital age, the need for good producers is only going to grow as well. Teams need someone who can keep targets in sight while also supporting them through the stress of the job. To that end, understanding the need that gave rise to the position, as well as more of what the position entails, is crucial to understand and incorporate further study into the burgeoning education in this field. Without this piece, not only is the fundamental picture of the industry incomplete, but students may also not be equipped to work well with one down the line or be one themselves. As the situation stands now, many producers learn on the job and the description may vary noticeably from company to company. An industry standard ought to form and bring job expectations closer together across game studios, however, this thesis is not equipped to provide that. Still, through highlighting the void the position filled and the current demands, it can provide guidance on the approach to education, and begin to lay the groundwork for a standard there.

3 The Interviews

The interview process began with research into different methods of data accumulations which involved the study of various interview techniques and types to encourage interviewee discussion, guarantee their comfort and, finally, ensure that as much useful information could be gleaned. This process also involved preemptive education on the topic at hand, as necessary [10], such that insightful and precise questions could be asked. The importance of qualitative research cropped up often in the preliminary research and, indeed, considering the numerous factors that inarguably shape the role and style of producership including but not limited to age, tenure, company culture, and team size, a focus on the unifying elements and the enrichment of experience quickly surfaced as the best approach for assembling the attached PDF materials to help future students. To that end, the interview method determined to best support this chosen style was a hybrid between semi structured, with questions to guide the flow of conversation, and qualitative, where each interviewee had the freedom to answer each question in their own way, including tangents and all. [11]

As the diversity of approach and expectation is both a given in this industry and worth highlighting to future students, candidates were selected to try and present, in microcosm, this wide array of diversity in the field. Thus, the interviewees consist of junior and senior producers and, while an attempt was made to ensure equal gender representation, circumstance dictated that, unfortunately, three of the four interviews conducted were with male producers and only one with a female producer. Additionally, the four candidates hold current positions at companies of varying size, since the aim was to get as many different point of views as possible. Two of the interviewees are from larger game companies, Housemarque and Remedy, which have been covered earlier. The remaining two included one from a small startup and the other from a larger startup.

The smaller startup is Quicksave, which was founded in 2017 by a handful of industry veterans, who wanted to pivot from PC, console and mobile games to a completely new and emerging platform of messaging and games within. The bigger startup is Redhill Games, a company founded in 2018 by ex-Remedy developers.

In keeping in compliance with the regulations set by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were held online via either Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype or Slack. The interviews were conducted within a period of two weeks.

The questions were designed to guide the interview without strictly limiting the pace or flow of information. The idea was to leave room for stories, insight, whatever information the interviewee thought relevant to share. Due to the onset of COVID-19 and the incalculable as of yet changes to life as we know it, an extra question was added asking the producers to address these changes and guess at the impacts this pandemic has and will cause within the game industry at large and within their own positions.

Below are the questions asked during the interview, the answers themselves can be found as an appendix:

1. *How did you end up in the role of a producer?*
2. *Have you had other roles within the game industry before becoming a producer?*
3. *What jobs have you had outside the game industry? How have they been beneficial for working as a producer?*
4. *The role of a producer has for a long time been a "well, someone should do this now" which has led to*
 - *Someone who feels obligated to do it because someone has to*
 - *Someone who has natural will/skill to organise*
 - *Someone who draws the proverbial "short stick"**This has fortunately changed in the last decade(s). How have you seen/experienced this change personally, if at all?*
5. *It has been said "A Producer does what nobody else wants to do." In your own words, how would you describe the job of a producer?*
6. *What sort of technical skills should a producer have?*
7. *Which or what kind of tools are important?*
 - *Physical and/or software?*
 - *Mental? Personality etc.?*
 - *Which skills are more important: social skills or technical skills?*
8. *What are the signs of a good producer? And what are the signs of a bad one?*
9. *Speaking of personality; social skills and relations are essential skills. What is the role and the responsibility of a producer if someone in the team isn't doing their job/causes trouble/lowers morale?*
 - *What are your first steps?*
 - *If it doesn't work, how do you go forward? Removal from the team? Possibility of firing them?*
 - *How would you deal with said situation (removal/firing)?*
10. *Short description of scheduling a game project, from the beginning to the end.*

11. *Crunch. The job of a producer is to schedule the projects so that overtime is not needed. However, if this happens what is the role of a producer during it?*
12. *Speaking of schedules, how should a producer act when it comes to new features? Be strict; adding a feature means removing another? No adding anything beyond a certain point?*
13. *How often do you end up doing something "that just has to be done"?*
Getting screenshots / video / getting some material that is needed / order food / find people who are needed / act as a shield to the team?
In essence, how often do you have to do so called "extra work", so that your team(s) can concentrate on work?
14. *Meetings and conferences, in your mind*
- *What is their role?*
 - *What is their danger?*
 - *What is the producer's role?*
15. *Do you take part in the recruiting? How?*
16. *What surprising/odd things have you ended up doing as a producer?*
17. *How has Corona affected your work?*
18. *Your own wise words about being a producer, the role of a producer or tips for aspiring producers?*

Name	Role (Place of work	Education	Volunteer
Miloš Jeřábek	Executive Producer	Redhill Games	Masaryk University, Brno	
	Development Director	Wargaming	Astrophysics	
	Production Director	Remedy Entertainment		
	Level Designer	ZootFly		
	Senior Scriptor	2k Games		
	Narrative Designer	Centauri Production		
Name	Role	Place of work	Education	Volunteer
Karoliina Kuutti	Producer & Screenwriter	Quicksave	Metropolia, 2015-2019	
	Producer	Helsinki Games Capital	B.A. Cinematography & Film Production	
	Junior Producer	PlayStack		
	Producer Trainee	Metropolia Game Studio		
	Social Media Coordinator	Forno		

Name	Role	Place of work	Education	Volunteer
Tony Salko- vuo	Associate Producer	Housemarque	Kajaani AMK, 2016-2019	Kajak Games board
	Event Manager	Northern Game summit	Game and Interactive Media Design	IGDA Finland
	Associate Producer	Full XP	Metropolia, 2015-2016	NGS
	Manager	Tiisiis	Computer Games and Programming	
	Manager	Seresta		
Name	Role	Place of work	Education	Volunteer
Juha Vainio	Executive Producer	Remedy Entertainment	Teknillinen korkeakoulu TKK	IGDA Finland
	CEO & Founder	Epic Owl	Master of Science	
	Head of UX/UI	Veikkaus		
	Project Lead / Executive Producer	Rovio		
	Head of UX Studios	Accenture		
	Head of UX Studios	Nokia		

Table 1. Here are the producers I interviewed, with a short recounting of their work history, their education as well as their possible volunteer work related to the game industry. Producing and Being a Producer

3.1 Introduction

The dive into the history of the Finnish game industry showed how the shift from hobbyists to professionals demanded more oversight and management, in other words: producers. More important to note is how organically it grew from the growth of the industry; some of the responsibilities producers take on were always there in the background, some arose with the growth of companies, such as stress and communication across teams. Management of time, of teams, of people and of goals is a huge point of the job, however, it is an elusive role to pinpoint since it encompasses so many tasks outside the common description. It can be difficult to discuss this position because unlike with an artist or a programmer, there is a wide swath of expectations that can vary from company to company and country to country which, especially now that the games market is a global one. The history of the industry has shaped the position and, now, through interviews and research, this thesis will look at the specifics of that position. Answering questions such as 'what is it' and 'how to become one' and highlighting the experience and finally there will be a conclusion of a skill set that makes a good producer and that should be considered by game development students.

3.2 What Makes a Producer?

Neogames (an umbrella organisation for the Finnish game industry, advocating the industry's shared interests) describes game producing as follows [21]:

The game producer directs, coordinates and monitors the development of the game. The game producer is responsible for placing the game on the market according to schedules and budget, and for ensuring that the end product meets the set goals. The work requires coordination skills, planning skills and managerial skills, as well as knowledge of the game development process. In addition to economics, you also need to know the possibilities of technology and the arts. Good interaction skills and communication skills are necessary in the profession.

As another example, a job opening for an Associate Producer at Remedy lists the responsibilities as [22]:

- Run daily stand up meetings for their specific team and developer rounds on their tasks ensuring the work is estimated and updated to reflect its current status
- Generate sprint reports for their team, showing the current amount of work in the backlog and the teams' current velocity and communicate this with producers and leads
- Setup weekly backlog refinement and triage meetings with leads and producers for their respective team
- Manage teams' Jira dashboard, ensuring critical information is presented as required by producers, directors and leads
- Organize meetings required by directors and leads
- Arrange review meetings, take care of the meeting documentation and distributing it to relevant stakeholders on schedule
- Collect feedback for features, missions, assets, cut scenes etc., add it into Confluence and Jira and assign it to the correct sub-team and/or developer

Requirements and qualifications:

- Excellent time management and organisational skills, with demonstrable experience of working under pressure to tight deadlines and managing a high workload with conflicting priorities
- Approachable demeanor with excellent interpersonal skills and the ability to influence and manage a range of relationships in a complex environment
- Strong communication skills in English (verbal, written and listening): an ability to present information accurately and concisely

Both of these descriptions put emphasis on management, oversight, deadlines and teamwork, however, the execution of these values is wide open to interpretation. In fact, the definition of producer itself is open and the lists above, although overlapping, do not match nor are they exhaustive. They illuminate key ideas and commonalities the industry agrees on but do not and cannot reflect the expectations at every company. Approaches differ from company to company and individual to individual; how a company or individual reminds others of deadlines or oversees a project varies, from micromanagement to broader checkpoints to only stepping in at the very end for the pre-deadline hustle.

This ambiguity is largely owed to how fairly new the role is. Recall, in Finland, the game industry did not see formal producers until the 2000s. Before that, the industry rose from garages and free time and these responsibilities were often left in the care of those who could, or had the time, to do them. Besides, as hobby projects, deadlines could be flexible. Now, with grander budgets than ever before, marketing campaigns and official, often highly anticipated release dates, the stress on teams to deliver on their goals and on time is greater than ever before. In light of that, the importance of the role becomes abundantly clear.

Good producers, as agreed upon across the sources read and, unknowingly, among the four interviewees (who were all interviewed separately), support developers. The same ambiguity that makes precisely defining what a producer does is what allows them to adjust to support the needs of their teams as the situation requires. Sometimes a producer's job means sitting down with an employee and talking about their personal life when issues in their personal life spill over and begin to affect their work life and well-being. Sometimes it means an office with an open door policy so that anyone from the team can vent about any frustrations or distractions. Sometimes it means a trip to Ikea and building furniture so the team has a place to work. Sometimes it means sending an employee home that is working themselves too hard before they burn out. Sometimes, it means becoming an ad hoc team member, going through the bug list and performing bug triage the whole day. There is no one way to support a team and no job description can fully prepare prospective producers for every problem they may encounter on the job. None of the above, save game triage, appeared

anywhere in the definitions above and, yet, they are all real life examples provided by the interviewees.

Companies and their expectations are important, as are hitting deadlines and releasing a high quality game, but producers are more than managers. They monitor the health of projects, but also of their employees, lifting their burdens and dealing with the stresses, both big and small, so the team can focus on their narrower tasks. Producing requires far more than the job description to ensure the best possible work environment, physically and mentally, for the team.

Being a producer is a multifaceted role. To make it more complex, producing exists and is seen differently around the world and, as the trend for more global work environments continues, that means these expectations will increasingly affect the Finnish market, and vice versa. Be it more partnerships across studios or even the growing diversity in population and, thus, workers, there is worth in knowing more from outside the Finnish borders; an increased understanding can help shape the role positively and help further define it. For instance, a point raised in the interviews mentioned how, in the USA and the Nordics, producers are respected and appreciated but, elsewhere, such as in Central and Eastern Europe, they are looked down upon, a barely necessary evil. To go more into depth falls out of the scope of this thesis, however, multicultural attitudes and insight are other sensitivities the producer must be aware of and handle.

Moreover, with producers working so closely with their team members, there are many times an assumption that many of the producer's responsibilities stray into the realm of Human Resources (hereinafter referred to as HR). HR is the corporate entity meant to support employees, however, the reality of the situation is often that HR, at the end of the day, secures companies against liabilities. Their priority isn't employee happiness but mediating disputes to prevent employees from pursuing legal action against the company. Lately, HR has seen a split into two divisions, company and employee, a change meant to address the perspective HR and their resultant advice takes, however, this undertaking is far from widespread, let alone the industry standard, and even where it does exist, HR always keeps the bottom line of the company in mind. This is not as drastic in

Finland as it is in many other countries but it is still something to keep in mind. Therefore, producers can be the first, and at times the only, line of defence in protecting their employees' well-being.

Producing, then, it could be argued, is the role that, by far, has the widest range of responsibilities and requires the most versatility. And, as mentioned, there are as many approaches to meeting these expectations as there are people. That said, producers can be broadly divided into two categories: people-oriented or data-oriented. Neither can be wholly one or the other as both need management tools and communication skills to be effective, however, producers do tend to lean toward one or the other. As both are valid approaches, both will be examined.

3.3 People Driven Producing

People Driven Producing (hereinafter referred to as PDP) is a self-coined term to define the producing approach that prioritises the people on teams over the project. In simpler terms, they adhere to the principle that “production in the long term means taking care of people”, reasoning that, as it is the team that makes the game, a healthy team will result in a better product. [18]

The game industry, while technical, also overlaps the entertainment industry and, like film or television, is in many ways an industry of passion; corporations may choose which games receive funding and have ultimate say on the execution, the same way Hollywood studio executives choose which scripts to pick up and how the idea translates to the silver screen, and their strategy is profit-oriented but, zooming into the micro level, the employees, usually, are deeply invested in their work and eager to make the best product they can. Therein lies the passion, and that drive coupled with increasing demands from studios and tight deadlines can easily lead to developers overworking themselves at the expense of their family, marriage or even their own health. The horror stories surrounding the infamous crunch time and the months of late hours, takeout pizza, and a team in perpetual stress, attest to this, however, as mentioned in 'What Makes a Producer?', stressors of any severity can crop up at any time and affect the team. A PDP oriented producer would step in to address, alleviate or protect the team from these stressors first

and foremost and trust that, in so doing, the quality of the work the team will go on to do will improve.

The PDP method proved to be, by far, the more common avenue of undertaking the job. Out of the interviews conducted, three of four preferred this method in every company they had worked in across the industry. Books, too, stressed interpersonal skills, albeit less thoroughly and with less range of experience than provided by the interviewees, many of whom worked in this industry for years and have a stockpile of stories more specific than broad theory.

In fact, a common thread among those that advocate for a PDP approach is that there is almost nothing a producer would not do to help the team. Naturally, producers need to be mindful to respect the boundaries of their employees and not hover and micromanage in their desire to help but anything else that shields the team from distractions and enables them to create their best work is something a PDP producer is prepared to do. This is why it has been highlighted over and over in the books and the interviews, how it is a great boon for a producer to have a varied background, for one never knows when any odd thing can come in hand. In fact, many of the interviewees mentioned that the producer needs to be the person who ensures that things get done and takes care of the tasks no-one else does. With direct quotes such as “The guy who makes sure shit happens” and “A producer does what has to be done”, it is clear that this is an necessary part of a producers role [15, 18]

3.4 Data Driven Producing

Data Driven Producing (hereinafter referred to as DDP) represents the other end of the spectrum in method, the one that places priority on the product and analytics rather than the people. In truth, as the term spectrum implies, a producer cannot be solely data driven and ignore the needs of people nor can they be solely people driven and ignore the final product. DDP stresses the managerial side: hitting deadlines and targets on time, using tools such as Jira or Excel to track and monitor progress, workflow, etc..

DDP also tends to be the more common method for those in senior roles, such as Executive Producers, especially in situations where producers are not in charge of their own teams. For instance, Executive Producers can have other producers (Associate

Producers, etc.) beneath them on the chain of command with their own teams; in that case, the senior staff does not have direct communication with the development departments and must, instead, rely on the data to paint a picture of the progress. They often work closely with the leads (Lead Programmer, Lead Architect, Art Director) of the project, in a similar fashion.

It is also worth noting that the DDP approach is far more prevalent in bigger studios. In fact, it almost has to be. Bigger studios have far more specialised roles than smaller ones, meaning the teams can be quite large and divided. As a loose example, an artist in a small game company might design the art for the game itself, the website, the merchandise, the marketing material, essentially anything that requires a graphic whereas, an artist in a big game company might only be responsible for weapon design and creation for a year or two while a colleague would take up armour and the marketing department would handle merchandise and materials and so on. These large team sizes means it is more difficult as a producer to really bond with everyone well enough to notice shifts in demeanour, work quality or, indeed, build the trust that enables employees to share sometimes incredibly personal and sensitive issues.

In bigger studios, each development team has its own producer; to use the previous example, the weapons team where the weapon artist works would have a producer and the armour team where the armour artist works would have their own producer. The producers are expected to work strictly in their own teams; they have their own territory. In such a rigid environment, it can also be the case that a producer cannot reach out or do much for an employee not a part of their team, assuming they are able to notice that something needs addressing.

These environments tend to force a DDP approach, a focus on project goals and meeting deadlines. Missed deadlines or poor engagement in meetings and official complaints tell these types of producers that the team is unhealthy, rather than an employee's personal behaviour. In extreme cases, this distress affects the culture of the company and can spill out of the office, affecting the company's reputation as infamously happened with Rockstar games on the production of Red Dead Redemption. [23] Producers and management more focused on target goals and deadlines pressured employees of all departments to, rather than manage the stress, take on more until swathes of developers broke and quit. And therein lies the dark side to DDP producing: prioritising goals over

people too much can result in teams shouldering too much and ultimately lead to massive employee burnout and turnover.

3.5 The Path to Producing?

The path to becoming a producer is not linear, a fact supported by the wildly varying backgrounds of all those interviewed. While the interviews conducted only take from a small sample size, the cross section they provide echoes anecdotes of industry experience all the same: three of the four interviewees themselves and all of the colleagues they mentioned became producers by luck or happenstance. Generally speaking, most producers, 75% in this small scale study, find the position without looking for it.

From there, finding out whether or not they fit the role is trial and error. Those who remain do so because they find success and enjoyment in their work and are satisfied. Others use the job to reposition themselves for another role. As an example, it is not uncommon for producers to leverage their experience to move into game design. As discussed in the previous section, producing requires a versatility that simply does not suit everyone and, often, is not wholly clear before taking the role.

Schools, however, are beginning to offer courses and degrees aimed specifically at producing. In fact, there are roughly 50 producing education opportunities in Finland (of varying degrees of depth, ranging from one class on offer to a specialised degree). [24] Education is how both of the younger producers interviewed found their way to the job faster; one studied TV and film production, though their passion lay in making games, and the other began by studying game development and transferred into a game producing programme. This opened their eyes and directly set them on the trajectory to becoming a producer; because of their degree, this interviewee knew they wanted to work as a producer before beginning their career, the only one in the study and a rarity in the industry. The educational background of both these people meant their career paths were less

winding than those of their older counterparts and gave them an advantage over their less-informed peers when applying for internships and careers.

Education informs and influences the prospective jobs students go on to apply for and prepares them to meet the challenges they will face in these roles. The same holds true here; as more institutions add producing to the curriculum, even one course, they expose students to the role, and the demands of it, much faster than they might otherwise be. Given how integral producers are to the industry, it is not surprising that so many schools in Finland are offering opportunities.

Only three universities and ten universities of applied sciences in Finland offer full on game producing degrees. [13] Not to mention the fact that some of the interviewees found the course material in these programmes to be lacking. Even at the universities of applied sciences, curriculums focus heavily on technical learning, like prioritising tools and production workflows, and far less on developing interpersonal skills and communication which are, arguably, the biggest part of being a producer.

3.6 Tools of the Trade

Unsurprisingly, there are large differences between the two different approaches when it comes to the tools they use. As an example, DDP producers tend to swear by different kind of project management/planning tools and software. This is in strict contrast to PDP producers, who literally cite their ears, conversation and relationships with team members as their most important tools.

3.7 Digital tools

There is a myriad of these project management tools, so many that it would be useless to list them all here. However, in order to support this thesis, here are the ones that came up most often, since they are prevalent within the Finnish game industry:

- Trello

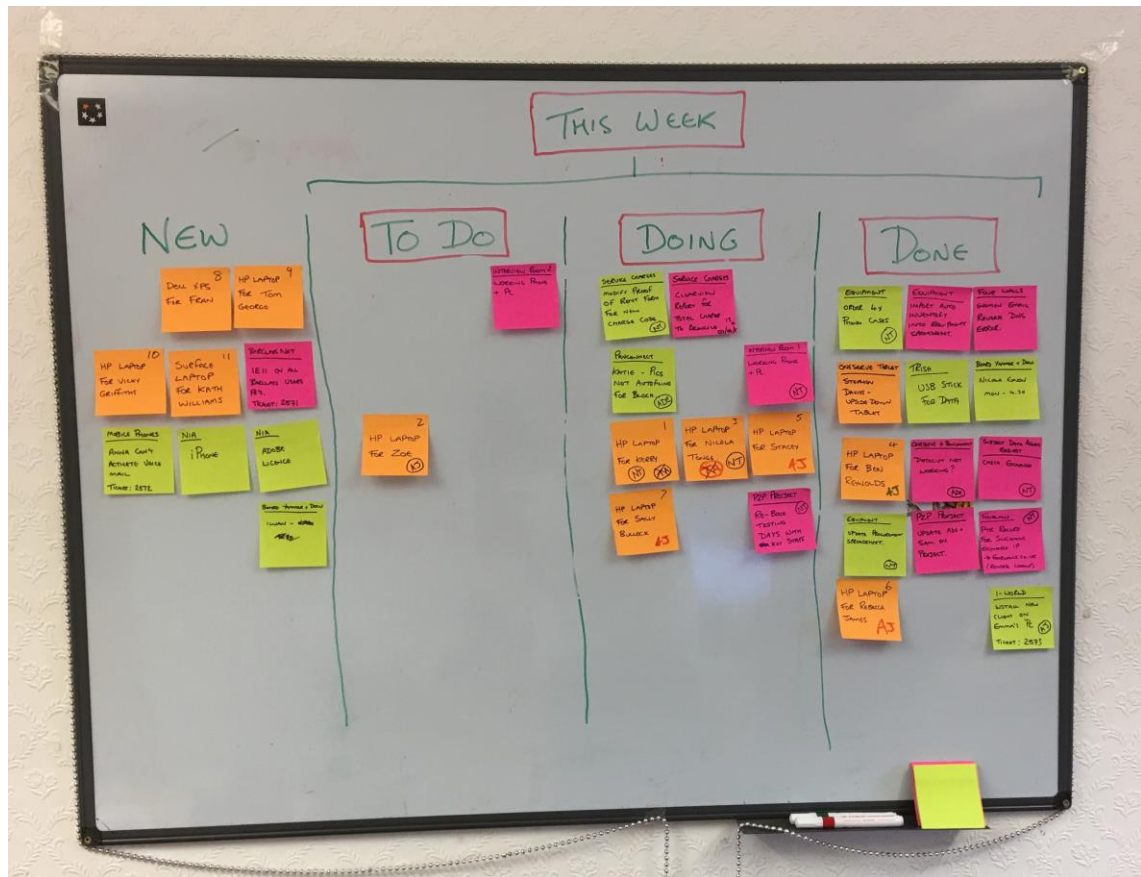
- Jira
- Hansoft
- Confluence
- Excel / Google Sheet
- Powerpoint / Goole Slides

As said, this is not a comprehensive list, just the most common ones in use in the Finnish game industry.

3.8 Physical Tools

What people from both methods, as well as the books on the subject, agreed upon, is that the very basic tools are the same: whiteboards, an unending supply of Post-Its, notepads and Kanban boards. Sometimes the physicality of more old-fashioned tools such as notebooks and whiteboards trump the ease that digital tools offer. It did come up, that at times the walls of the offices of producers show more Post-Its than wall itself (see figure 14). Similarly, whiteboards are incredibly effective at conveying ideas, especially more complicated ones, are good for brainstorming and can at times be used as makeshift Kanban boards.

Figure 14. A simple example of a Kanban board to exemplify the tool. The idea is to have all the tasks on the left in the New-section where each team member takes the tasks assigned to them and moves it to the To do-section, showing that they've taken the task upon themselves. Once they are working with said task they put it in the Doing-section. Once done with the task, they finally move it to the Done-section. This tool brings many benefits for any team using it. It helps the whole team (and especially the producer) see where and how the project is going, it gives a morale boost when tasks are physically moved forward on the board, and just the fact that people have to get up and walk around periodically is proven to combat fatigue and improve concentration as well as mood. [41]



3.9 Frameworks

On top of physical and digital tools there are frameworks with which to organise the teams, the schedule and the project. The ones that were specifically mentioned were Agile and Scrum.

Agile is a project philosophy/framework that has a heavy emphasis on an iterative approach for completing projects. It aims to have regular interaction with the client, with the idea of having a deeper and more open-minded understanding of the scope of the project that, based on the feedback from the client, may evolve. Because of the iteration, it is possible to be agile and on top of the possible changes to the project.

Scrum is essentially an Agile approach, as in it has the iterative process, regular interaction with the client and decision making in a collaborative manner. However, while Scrum is an Agile approach, Agile approach does not always mean Scrum. It is a version of Agile that has come to be popular enough to warrant its own name.

4 Conclusion

The role of a producer is very different from the rest of the roles in the development teams, due to how multifaceted and demanding it can be, and is therefore resistant to being summed up in a single word or phrase. A programmer has a very clear and well defined role, goal and tasks, the same holds true for artists, game designers, audio designers/directors and writers. Almost all of the positions in game development are niche, with a specific focus, and, moreover, none of these jobs are expected to drop their routine to shoulder unrelated, unpredictable, sometimes personal issues those on their team may be facing. None of these jobs are expected to navigate according to the grand vision of a project at the same time and, more than that, be able to explain it accessibly on demand through all of the changes and iterations, organise and facilitate meetings (and act as the secretary during and after said meeting), pitch the project to the rest of the team, company or investors, edit trailers, make the website, set up offices and adapt to situations that could be listed for pages. This is why it is impossible to precisely and succinctly define the role; it can encompass most anything.

What has become clear by both looking at the history of the game industry and how it has evolved, and how game projects are handled today, is that the role of a producer has become critical for not only the timely finishing of games but for the health of the people making them. And, unfortunately, it is a role that remains largely unknown, partially due to its versatility and difficulty to pin down, partially due to how new it is within the industry. For a while, producers have accidentally discovered the role and been forced to learn on the job whether or not they fit. Over the course of examining the demands placed upon producers in real life scenarios, this paper hopes to not only demystify what it is exactly a producer does but also to expose game design students and future industry professionals toward a career opportunity that might suit them sooner.

To that end, to close, here are some bits of advice from the producers interviewed. These are not technical, but are simply the wisdom these four interviewees wanted to impart on possible future producers:

Listen, learn and be humble. A good producer is not always in the forefront but in the back, supporting the team. There are no jobs that are beneath a producer; if it needs to be done and it frees the team to focus on the project, then it gets done. The team comes first, every time. Focus on each step, not the whole of the project, portion sized pieces are easier to manage than a behemoth.

Do not be afraid to speak up. If there is something new or something that is difficult, say it out loud. It is better to learn early than let it become an issue later on. Similarly, after making a mistake or doing something wrong, own it. Not only will people respect the honesty, but it will also nip all kinds of issues it might cause later on. Speaking up also means that it is always okay to ask things. Many of the producers in this thesis would not either have the job they have now, or as big of a role as they do, if they did not ask for advice, pointers, opportunities and more.

Finally, there is no such thing as useless experience as a producer, since anything might come handy at some point. So keep on learning, embrace the past experiences and keep on having new ones.

Also, network. Meet people, talk about games with them, talk about the passion for playing and making them, go to events, volunteer, take part in projects. It is by far the best way of both getting a job within the industry and to advance in it. And, who knows, there might be a friend or two waiting out there.

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Producer Guidelines for Students

This is the Producer Guidelines-PDF for students to use when working in team projects. These are simple guidelines meant to highlight what experienced producers found most important, not a comprehensive, in depth look into the work of a producer.

The idea is to make this PDF available for all students at Metropolia, specifically those in the Game Major working on game projects. If need be, it can be used for other projects as well, but it was made with game development in mind.

PRODUCER GUIDELINES

FOR TEAM PROJECTS

This is a guideline for students to follow when working as a team. The idea is to give provide management tools to work with, to aid you in achieve your goals and to shed some light of the role of a producer. I strongly recommend every team to have a producer in the team, for the sake of the project. The producer has some more work, but I want to stress that the whole team supports the producer in these tasks, making a game is a team effort after all. And with more responsibility comes more experience.

Remember, these are simple guidelines, not an in depth look into the work of a producer. They're here to help you get a project up and running and hopefully show you the benefits of a producer in the team.

RIGHTS

PRODUCER

The producer has the right to:

- Set **schedules**
- Set **priorities**
- Assign **tasks**

TEAM

The team has the right to:

- To always **talk** with the producer about any **problems**
- **Request** for tasks/schedules/priorities
- **Ask** for **help** with anything

RESPONSIBILITIES

PRODUCER

The producer has the responsibility to make sure everyone:

- In the team gets **heard**
- Can **focus** on their **task**
- Has **access** to all the **info**

TEAM

The team has the responsibility:

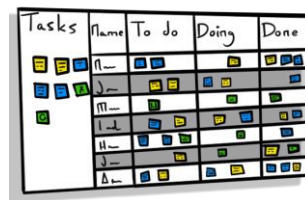
- Accept the **schedules**
- Follow the **priorities**
- Accept the **tasks**
- **Provide** the **info** the producer asks
- Be **candid** with the **producer**

ROUTINE

These are tasks that should be done on a regular basis. They are all done to ensure the project keeps a forward momentum and the targets and end goals in sight at all times. With the effective use of these tools, nobody in the team should ever be caught in a situation where they are unsure of what their responsibilities are, when the deadlines are and where to get help/info if needed.

This organisational approach also helps the producer (and possibly the whole team) have a good idea how the project as a whole is progressing.

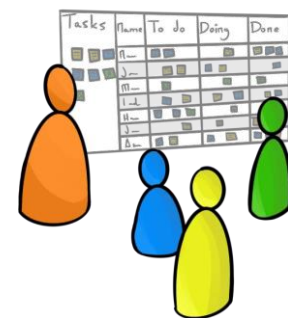
KANBAN



The idea is to have all the tasks on the left in the **Tasks**-section where each team member takes the tasks assigned to them and moves it to the **To do**-section, showing that they've taken the task upon themselves. Once they are working with said task they put it in the **Doing**-section. Once done with the task, they finally move it to the **Done**-section.

This tool brings many benefits for any team using it; it helps the whole team (and especially the producer) see where and how the project is going, it offers a morale boost when tasks are physically moved forward on the board, and the fact that people have to get up and walk around periodically combats fatigue and simultaneously improves concentration and mood.

DAILIES

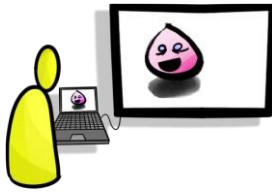


A meeting held every day, at the beginning of the day, where the tasks of the day are dealt. Can either be dealt by the producer or the team members can choose for themselves. Not the place nor the time for discussion. Can report if there are problems, so the producer knows about them and can take care of it. Must be kept short, no more than 15 minutes at maximum.

Use the Kanban board to clearly tag the daily tasks for each team member.

If a physical meeting, everyone stands to keep it short.

WEEKLIES



Once a week, can be either in the beginning or at the end of the week. Can be around 1-2h, depending on the team size. This is where each part of the team shows what they've done during the week and tells what they're going to do in the coming week.

Here the team members can tell of obstacles they've run into during the week as well, a good way for others to learn so they don't have to go through the same hassle. A great way of ending the week by letting people celebrate and show off a little, with what they've achieved.

Let the team have some fun.

TASKS

These are all of the little chores and duties that the producer has both the right *and* responsibility to assign, with the schedule being the most important one. That is not to say that this is a dictatorship, far from it; all the team members need to be consulted and heard from, especially when making the schedule. Yet it is imperative to have a schedule in place and this is something that the producer, with the bigger picture in mind, is perfectly poised to make.

Meetings are another just as important tool, although often misused. They should be short and efficient, and only held when there's an actual need for them. This is another part where the producer can shine, since they can help organise these meetings as well as keep them in check.

Finally, clear instructions. A team member working on the wrong thing or working on it in the wrong way is just as bad as not working at all.

SCHEDULE

	MVP			Demo	
Team	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5
C	m	B	G	P	
A	m	O	A	O	
U	K	n	n	P	L
O	J	G	L	P	
O	L	O	J	L	
T	O	B	G	n	L
S	L	O	B	Y	
Y	L	S	E	O	

Don't just plan on working until the deadline. It helps to split the project into smaller pieces with smaller, personal deadlines arranged in advance so the project can remain on track. Also remember Murphy's law and leave yourself some time.

Example:

If the full time for the project is two months, break it into two main time slots. Each of these will have an end goal (Most Viable Product, Playable Demo). Then break the months into weeks or fortnights with their own goals.

Every team member/part of the team needs to have their own schedule and is responsible for hitting their deadlines. In the case of emergency or unexpected setbacks, these should be communicated to the producer and relevant parties that will be affected.

MEETINGS



The producer sets up meetings and the rest of the team needs to show up ready to discuss the topic at hand. The producer will act as secretary and keep notes of the meeting, noting things such as new tasks like the design of new assets, or a pivot in the project, like the removal of some features.

After the meeting the producer will make sure that the tasks are sent to the corresponding people and the general info is available for all.

INSTRUCTIONS



No task or direction should read: "Make X". Always explain in detail what is wanted.

Example:

"Make a combat-system" would be split into smaller categories

Weapons

- What kind of?
- What kind of damage (bleeding, poison?)

Damage

- Is there just one or several kinds?
- Is it just a simple "Hit points - damage" calculation or something more advanced?

Armour

- Just another health bar or something else?

Movement

- Does taking damage affect it?
- Do weapons affect it?

FINAL WORDS

Once again, these are simple guidelines for any game design team to help make their visions come true. Naturally, the smaller the team, the less need for some of the tools and practices outlined here, but many are beneficial no matter the size of the team, such as the Kanban, dailies, and the schedule. In fact, those tools are still effective even when working solo.

Hopefully, this brief introduction to producing and some of its most valuable tools will help you and your team!

Interview answers

To make it easier to read I've colour coded the answers per person.

Milos is in yellow, Karoliina is in green, Tony is in purple and Juha is in blue.

1. How did you end up in the role of a producer

Milos:

Just happened. 10 years in the industry, lead level designer.

When Remedy had problems with production, they asked if Milos wanted to become a producer. His first reaction was "don't want to do any of that production shit". Then he spoke with a friend who did production, and it made him realise that he was already doing it by bringing the level team together and managing them. Senior Producer 2014 -> Production Director 2016

Karoliina:

Education background in film and tv-production, graduated with a Bachelor of Culture and Arts from Metropolia in 2019. Producer wasn't considered a high-brow title within the industry and she realised in the middle of her studies that film was not her thing. After graduating she talked with their professor about how she wanted to break into the game industry instead, as she had been a gamer her whole life. She knew Metropolia had a game major and asked if she could work with games. In the end, she got in as a producer-intern at the Metropolia Game Studio.

While she began as a producer, recently she has worked more as a writer and narrative-designer but she does not want to give up being a producer. The company she works at is a startup so everyone does a little bit of everything, and even the CEO and Creative Director take on some traditionally producer duties.

On top of that she is the producer of Helsinki Games Capital.

Tony:

Originally aimed to be a designer within the industry but changed his university when he did not get into the game major. At his second university, he studied to become a producer. As Tony had a fair amount of experience as a manager in restaurants, this new role came naturally to him and now he enjoys that he gets to support people in their own mastery. While he initially wanted to become a designer, he would not change his job anymore.

Juha:

It all started, in all honesty, through happenstance which then led to goal-oriented advancement. When an opportunity showed itself he took it.

2. What other work have you done within the game industry before becoming a producer?

Milos:

Narrative designer, level design, lead technical designer (pathfinding, AI, cover system, vaulting, etc.). The lead technical designer role was already working as the glue between all the teams and making everyone working together.

Could not imagine being a producer without all the above mentioned experience. As a producer it's necessary to understand what people are doing and how they do it. Part of a producer's job is to estimate schedules and deadlines, which can be challenging because, as a producer, you get lied to a lot. Not maliciously, but people are bad at estimating how long tasks take to complete. Producer's who come from QA are probably some of the best.

Karoliina:

She has not really worked in the industry before her current role as a producer.

Tony:

Only experience is from school and game jams, so he cannot really say.

Juha:

Juha started as a programmer in the 90s but his career led to management at Nokia and, through that experience, he realised that leading came to him more naturally than programming. From Nokia he ended up at Accenture as a manager but he did not like the company culture so he left fairly quickly. At this point he wondered, as he played video games his whole life, if there was a possibility to work in the game industry. He put in an open application to Rovio where he was hired as a Game Producer. By the time he left Rovio to start his own company, Epic Owl, he had worked his way up to Executive Producer.

Unfortunately Epic Owl did not work out so he applied to Remedy Entertainment and got in a job as a Producer. From there he advanced to a Lead Producer and, finally, to the Executive Producer he is today. His personal goal was always to take a job that he was slightly overqualified for, to learn the processes, the tools and the company culture and after that advancement has happened naturally.

3. *What jobs have you had outside the game industry? How have you seen them as beneficial for working as a producer?*

Milos:

Started in the industry at 16.

Worked for newspapers, helped tremendously as a lvl designer, as a producer.

- How to work with people, how to talk to strangers, as he did not like talking to people he didn't know
- Boss made him go outside to get answers from strangers
- Took 2 hours, borderline crying "what will I do"
- After getting it done and returning to his boss "You should never be afraid to talk to people and it was effective"

Karoliina:

Through her studies she worked as a producer, director and a writer. In her words, the film and game industry go hand in hand since they have a lot in common. If anything, the film industry is behind the times with its rather strict hierarchy and "need" to be art for art's sake, whereas games are art and can answer different needs more rapidly than the film industry.

Tony:

Worked as shift manager and manager in a restaurant, so leading and helping people is something Tony was familiar with from the get-go. The stress tolerance he gained from working at a restaurant has been a great help within the game industry. "Doesn't matter

how shitty a day you're having, keep smiling for the others and keep the team's morale high."

Juha:

Worked as a programmer for a long time and working as a producer, it helps to know a little bit of everything and knowing code helped to communicate with the programmers. Project management has been nearly 1:1 when it comes to the tasks a producer has. All the supervisor experience he has accumulated has helped a lot, even if the job of a producer is not strictly one of a supervisor.

4. *The role of a producer has for a long time been a "well, someone should do this now" which has lead to*
 - a. *Someone who feels obligated to do it because someone has to*
 - b. *Someone who has natural will/skill to organise*
 - c. *Someone who draws the proverbial "short stick"**This has fortunately changed in the last decade(s). How have you seen/experienced this change personally, if at all?*

Milos:

It has changed in both positives and negatives.

Positives:

Often they were the ones who "just had to do it". Production was something nobody liked. Similar to being a lead. Being a producer or a lead isn't something anyone wanted to do. Production is still seen as a "stink" in Czech. People are ashamed of being producers. Central/Eastern Europe does not like/respect them while Finland and the United States are better in that sense.

Negatives:

People coming from schools with no knowledge. Especially in the UK and the US. They're good with tools, excel and production workflows but bad with people and the realities of game development. Finland and Sweden have an edge here because (the) universities send their students to do internships. Producer is as ever only as good as their team, and therefore, must make sure the team has everything they need.

Karoliina:

Cannot say, as she has not been around long enough.

Tony:

He has heard a lot as he works at Housemarque, which is the oldest game company in Finland. For example, many projects were worked on without any producers. Housemarque is working on their biggest project to date, which has been a tightly held secret for many years now and it has changed the way the company works in many ways. The producers spend a fair amount of time making sure that the company stays modern in their methods.

Juha:

Already at the end of the 90s, the revenue of the game industry surpassed that of the film industry so it has been a big industry for a long time. Juha started in the industry in 2012 and as long as he has been a part of it, the business side of the industry has been a very strong, core part of it all. But the role of a producer has always been a bit more vague and for a while it was just about who drew the short stick to take care of the essential arrangement so the team/company can work.

5. *It has been said "A Producer does what nobody else wants to do." In your own words, how would you describe the job of a producer?*

Milos:

He likes the saying, and finds it true in many ways but he would describe a producer as "The guy who makes sure shit happens". They know when to get the team moving and making decisions. Basically, their role is to service and enable teams.

A producer does anything and everything. They're also forced to adapt and learn many, many random things because they have had to come up with solutions for all kinds of situations like building IKEA furniture, brewing coffee, sorting out papers, just to name a few. Producer has the big picture, devs have more of a smaller picture. Sometimes they have to tell people NOT to work, when they work too much.

Everyone thinks the producer is there to get the product done but actually production is people. So production in the long term means taking care of people.

From his vast experience, he spoke about seeing a company with an 80% divorce rate and people who have had literal heart attacks from the stress they're under. A sad fact of the industry is sometimes people will work themselves sick and endanger their health for a project and part of a producer's job is handling that. The producer and lead are there to make sure the team feels like family. To that end, for him, time isn't the most valuable resource, people are. With enough people and time management techniques you can battle time and maybe even avoid the infamous hellish crunch time altogether.

In fact, in his role as a producer, he often had to fight HR in order to take care of his employees as, sadly, in big companies HR is often in place for the company and not the protection of the employee. By now, some big companies are dividing HR into a company side and an employee side, but this approach is far from widespread.

Karoliina:

The description is apt, according to Karoliina. "You might end up taking care of jobs nobody else has time for and sometimes you end up working on something that is outside your area of expertise." She takes these jobs happily on herself as she knows this is a great way for her to help the team and even personally ease the workload of the others.

Sometimes, she explains, producers up in situations where, for example, the CEO asks can you do this as nobody else has the time or knows how to do it and it feels good to be valued and an important part of the team. Being a so-called jack-of-all-trades comes naturally to her and according to her, suits the role of producer well.

Tony:

According to Tony, it depends very much on the company and the team. Housmarque has another producer he knows that uses project management tools to hone the pipeline, whereas Tony likes a more personal approach; to talk and to get to know his team. Instead of saying "A Producer does what nobody else wants to do" he argues the quote should be "A producer does what has to be done". In some companies the Lead Programmer/Artist might take care of the team and in some it might be up to the producer. He does find that he can still learn a considerable amount from other producers as their approach is so different.

Juha:

It depends entirely on the team and the company. If you have a smaller team making a game, you would not hire an extra person to do only one or two things, instead the responsibility for what others cannot or do not have time for would fall upon the producer. For example, Juha ended up programming server software and mixed music for games. At Remedy each producer has very specialised and devoted teams and with over 200 employees meaning that each job, no matter how specialised, has a dedicated doer. Juha likes to stress the difference between mobile and triple-A games; on the mobile side an artist might have to do every single piece of art, from concept art to animations, from cover art to background art when a triple-A game there can be an artist doing nothing but designing the weapons of a game. In a similar manner, a producer in a mobile game project has to sort out of all sorts of issues and run all kinds of errands, even fairly odd ones.

6. *What sort of technical skills should a producer have?*

A black belt in IKEA. But, really, a producer should be crafty in many ways. Producers need to be good with computers and able to grasp software.

- Producers sometimes overlap a bit with QA, as such, they should have basic knowledge of ALL KIND OF software.

They should also have basic presentation skills, know how to properly Google and, ideally, have a more analytical mind and approach to tackling problems. For him, astrophysics helped foster an analytical outlook and he stresses it as something important to succeed at managing so many moving parts.

Knowledge with tools like Jira and Hansoft etc. are good but not the most important.

Karoliina:

Technical skills are not mandatory, since most companies will teach what they need you to know. Quicksave, where Karoliina works, uses their own in-house technology they taught her when she started working there and she spent some of her time to get an in-depth understanding of it.

Tony:

Trello, Jira, Hansoft, Kanba, Confluence, Excel/Google Sheet, Powerpoint/Google Slides, Slack.

7. *Which or what kind of tools are important?*

a. *Physical and/or software?*

Milos:

Ears are the most important tools. Listening allows producers to keep better tabs on the people in their teams, to know the temperature of the work environment, hear if there are issues and, more than that, hear if multiple people are experiencing or attempting to tackle the same issue, which then allowed him to connect them and better streamline the efforts of the team.

While working at Wargaming, he learned Russian to be able to all of this, and to better close the language and cultural barriers he initially had with the team. To this end, he promised to hold a presentation in Russian in one year and, although it was a simple, surface-level one, he kept that promise and did what he could to reach out to his team.

As for more physical tools, post-its and notepads allow him to remember engagements, issues that need tackling, to-do lists and so forth. Whiteboards allow for more visual

communication or even for more team-oriented reminders, such as short and long term goals. He's such a believer in these tools that even the door to the bathroom is a washboard.

Xmind also makes for a great way to mindmap and Hansoft is an important planning tool.

Karoliina:

Casual conversations, asking on the sly how things are going, and building rapport and relationships with people is such an important tool. Like Milos, she advocates for always having one ear on the ground to hear what's going on, and so she can connect people who are working on the same issue without knowing it or better help those undergoing issues of a more personal or work-related nature.

Tony:

Whiteboard, Post-Its. A producer's job is to visualise the amount of work left, and the vast majority of the teams have a physical To do/Doing/Done-board in their rooms. Beyond that, other helpful tools include knowledge of how to run retrospectives and fish bowl, alongside Agile and SCRUM.

Juha:

Excel is the base of all producer work, and often accounts for around 90% of all work, but this is also often affected by which team you are the producer of. For example, the producer of the audio team has different needs and requires a different skill set than the producer of an art team. Whiteboards are a must-have and the rate at which Juha goes through Post-It notes is astonishing. A broken umbrella to scare the workers and keep them in line.

b. Mental? Personality etc.?

Milos:

The work of a producer is not visible, which can be slightly depressing. The best producers and leads are not noticed, and that's counter-intuitive for a lot of people.

Of course, producers are just lazy but that can be harnessed for good. They will find the easiest, lowest effort solutions.

Karoliina:

Her recommendation is a personality that pushes to talk with everyone around them and, more specifically, are invested in learning about the team. This helps staying on top of the "vibe" which leads to more open communication and it turns into a positive feedback loop.

Tony:

Carving out time to recharge is an important ability. At lunch, he puts a headset on to block most of the stimuli of the outside world to calm down with some music. He also recommends keeping in physical health as working out and being in shape helps with being able to push through day after day.

Juha:

You have to be good at organising. On top of that communication is probably the most important skill and task for a producer. Also the ability to not only plan, but change gears and either iterate on a current idea or jump into a backup plan as well as making sure there is a backup plan..

c. *Which are more important: social skills or technical skills?*

Social skills:

When it comes to social skills, it's important to have a humble personality. A bombastic person who wants a lot of attention will find the role difficult. Additionally, a producer who changes teams often probably isn't good, as they're unable to build up a relationship and rapport with their team.

Additionally, it's important to be a rock for the team, to be the kind of person they can come talk to when projects get emotional. That means being the last one to fall apart in stressful situation. A producer is the captain who goes down with the ship while steering it all the while. It's, of course, okay to admit to mistakes or to not know everything, or breakdown at home, all of which he's experienced, but it's crucial to keep it from the team and to keep a level head in the middle of a storm. The producer is a shield for the team. As such, it's important having the right disposition and social skills to really make it, more than the technical skills.

Karoliina:

Knows producers who rely more on different softwares and technical solutions rather than communication but personally she finds a personal, social approach to be better. At least at her current job.

Juha:

When making Control (the latest game Remedy released) Juha had a so-called "therapy chair" in his office. Anyone from the team could come, sit down and just pour out any problems and worries and stressors. This was invaluable for the team but sometimes it came at the cost of the producer's own well-being. He had to plan and schedule the project itself but on top of that, had to take care of the wellbeing of his team members. It requires a really strong personality to be a producer sometimes, and that usually outweighs the importance of technical skills.

8. *What are the signs of a good producer? And what are the signs of a bad one?*

Milos:

Best producer is not visible. The team works, everything is fine. Nobody knows that the producer is even there. Niel Petite, went from being a submariner in the UK military, as an organised person started doing production jobs. Wanted to have an amber meeting. Everyone has red meetings when everything is a disaster, amber is things that aren't disasters yet but very well be. Even though he was in the military, he is incredibly sociable and likeable.

Bad producer: Someone who is constantly checking up on people.

Karoliina:

Admits if they do not know what is going on, has the mental fortitude to admit when they do not understand something and need more information. It is essential for them to be honestly interested in the people they are working with, the work they do, how they work and, possibly, even their lives. Every company, every team has different ways of working, in some they follow very strictly what people do and in some not at all. "If you are genuinely invested in your work, it will show in the end result and in the team."

Tony:

Self control.

The ability to get into any situation with an open mind, without setting anything in stone beforehand. The skill and ability to remember *and* prioritise tasks, all the while keeping the big picture in mind. As an example of a bad producer Tony recalls a man they interviewed who was in the upper echelons when it came to his technical skills but considered developers to be nothing more than his underlings. He did not fit within the culture of Housemarque.

Juha:

9. *Speaking of personality, social skills and relations are essential skills. What is the role and the responsibility of a producer if someone in the team isn't doing their job/causes trouble/lowers morale?*

a. *What are your first steps?*

Milos:

First action is to find out why they're causing trouble. Without the "why" you can't fix it, maybe they're going through a messy divorce, maybe they've lost motivation, maybe someone they cared for died, maybe someone offended them, etc. That will set the course of action. Once had a guy who became a super asshole. Another employee got promoted and they didn't, then they became an asshole. Asked if they can get over their ego. Couldn't.

Karoliina:

There are always people whose motivation isn't at its height and then it, unfortunately, affects the rest of the team and possibly the project. Karoliina would start by talking with them and seeing where the problem lies, is it work or personal life?

Would also inform the product owner and the supervisor about the situation, even if it's never to "tell" on someone that they're doing bad work.

Tony:

A talk with them, one on one. What is going on? Is it a bad day, problems in personal life or is it something at work that is bothering them. If the problem is between two people, then facilitate a meeting with both participants and find out:

- What happened
- Who did what
- Why they did what they did
- What are the feelings of both of the people

Juha:

Depends a lot on what kind of a role the producer has in the team.

How Juha sees the issue is that a producer's priority is the product and a manager's priority is the employees. If an employee causes trouble it is not the producer's job to take care of the employee but rather to get the situation under control and make sure the schedule stays true and the product does not suffer. It is the manager's job to take care of the employee. In the case of a difficult employee he would talk with the manager of said employee. If this does not help, the employee has to be removed from the team in order to stop them from affecting the rest of the team.

In a conflict situation it is important to sit down with all relevant parties and make clear that you all have a common goal, that you are all in this together. The aim is to try to see all parties to see the other point of view in the conflict. If this is impossible, it is up to the producer to do what they see necessary.

b. *If it doesn't work, how do you go forward? Removal from the team? Possibility of firing them?*

i. *How would you deal with said situation (removal/firing)?*

Milos:

Approach by saying, "maybe this project isn't for you anymore" if it's true. Maybe change the team?

Firing should be the last option.

Chris from Wargaming and Why it's important to fire people fast:

- When he had a guy on his team who started being a problem, he spent around half a day, every day, devoted to fixing his problems
- Everyone saw this, everyone felt this
- The lead spent more and more time helping him out, less time supporting the team as a whole
- After 6 months he fired this person, it felt horrible at the time but the next day it felt good and very much like the right decision

Good producers will be able to recognise if it is beneficial to fire someone or not. If it is necessary, do it fast, be quick and make it as painless as possible. Can basically be summed up by this quote: "Better to quickly cut off a finger than let the rot spread to the whole arm and later having to cut off the whole arm. God forbid it gets to the body, then you die."

Karoliina:

She has not had to fire anyone yet but has expressed her worry regarding some employees, of which there has been further action. She does not consider herself as a supervisor/senior over the other employees as a producer. Neither does she consider that giving warnings or, especially firing, would fall under her responsibilities.

Tony:

If the aforementioned steps do not help then it is time to escalate the issue by bringing it either to the Executive Producer or to HR. As an Assistant Producer he doesn't have the rights to give warnings but could work it out with the person in question to move them from one team to another. However, he would not orchestrate this without a weighty reason and especially not without talking with them and the other team first.

This is why at Housemarque they spend a lot of time to make sure they only hire people who fit the company and have, for example, a 6 month trial period for new employees.

Juha:

In Finland it is quite difficult to fire people and even in conflict situations it is very uncommon to talk about firing the employee.

In the case of a difficult employee, the responsibility is on the manager of said employee. It is also possible and often recommended to take someone from HR with you when

dealing with a difficult employee. The more eyes and ears in the discussions and situations, the better. HR can also give an official warning and if none of these aforementioned steps work, then terminating the employment can be done.

10. *Short description of scheduling a game project, from the beginning to the end.*

Milos:

Before the project starts:

The producer should fuck off in the beginning and let the creatives take the lead.

Beginning:

Producer jumps really in when pre-production starts, when early things start moving. They can be part of pitching if they're creative enough, but ideally it's still time to let the creatives shine. Works on pre-production, making sure everyone knows what they're doing and the production pipeline. At this point, the producer should schedule a few months extra (but not tell the team) knowing that Murphy's law will screw you over, real hard. However, the more senior team you have, the less you need to schedule.

Sometimes people can say it's important to recognise the critical parts! These will most likely be the parts that will make the game delayed, so it's worth noting in game development where and when they crop up.

In production:

The producer makes sure everything is working. Now is the time to look for the amber alerts, before they become red disasters. This is where the producer becomes very important.

Polish:

This is where the producer should fuck off again. Make sure the teams have time, but give them freedom to choose what they're working on.

Bug fixing / shipping:

Everyone will hate you, as you will be doing triage, to go through the importance of each bug. He's spent 2-3 hours a day during this time in Jira, going through bugs to find the most critical ones.

Remedy had a team of people who would have their own "territory" to triage and take care of those parts.

In GaaS if something misses a deadline, you can still add it in the next few patches. In a AAA game it either makes it into the game or it doesn't.

Karoliina:

As an example, Karoliina brought up Game Jams. You have to make a game in one weekend. From the very beginning you have to consider resources and time to see if the idea the team is considering is even possible. There are such grandiose and great plans, which would of course be wonderful, but someone (the producer, that is) has to be the unfun reality checker who says "this is too much / we can't do that / we have to cut 70%". Someone has to be the realist who gives straight feedback to the team and makes sure the project does not get out of hand. They will ask the team members how long any feature will take to develop and try to pressure them into giving as realistic an estimation as possible.

When the team starts planning the game, the Producer is the one who makes sure there are solid, strong deadlines. Just like in her personal life, she likes to have some room to manoeuvre if something surprising comes up. You can't expect people to give their 100% all of the time, even at something as short as a Game Jam, which is important to keep in mind. With a schedule and deadlines that are too tight the team will feel it and the morale will suffer. Apart from force majeure, which you can not really do anything about, it is very good, if not imperative, that there is someone (the producer) who pushes the project further so that it will be finished.

Tony:

No experience of a commercial product from start to finish.

Juha:

Pre-pre-production

It is imperative to keep the schedule, budget and the resources in mind at all times of the process. A production plan has to be ready and the included estimates of expenses and profits have to be clear.

Production

In smaller teams you need a SCRUM-master who organises dailies, tasks, etc. Sometimes there will be obstructions that make working harder for people and these are issues that are up to the producer to solve.

Finishing

Bug triage is the act of assigning degrees of urgency to bugs to decide the order of priority. This is one of the most important tasks for a producer at this stage.

11. *Crunch. The job of a producer is to schedule the projects so that overtime is not needed. If, however, this happens what is the role of a producer when overtime is needed?*

Milos:

Keeping people sane. While you normally need to read the room, this is even more true when overtime is going. Offer home made food, lighters/matches, cigarettes, beer and do what you can to lessen the load of stress as much as possible. You need to be there in that moment.

Double check how their home life is, crunch can be rough for families. He's noticed that more and more people talk about crunch and the stress it places on the family. As the producer, you come first and you leave last; if your team is there, you're there. You need to be accessible to talk about these issues or lend a listening ear.

Finland, at least, has the best family vs. work approach, which can be good or bad depending on your perspective. It's good that people are protected but some laws are so pro-employee that they are almost anti-employer. The labour laws are very strict here.

The US and the UK are the worst when it comes to this family vs. work balance and their examples show the other end of the spectrum.

In fact, in Finland at least, many people crunch because they love it. And, so long as the motivation comes from the employees themselves and they are not hurting themselves to do so, it's okay to crunch and work hard on the game. When it's forced, it's not good.

Karoliina:

She has so far never been solely in charge of the schedules, as there has always been at least one other person to share the responsibility. So far, she has never had to tell the team to crunch, thanks to meticulous planning. In fact, if some of the deadlines have come too early, they have chosen to get rid of some features rather than forcing the team to crunch.

Tony:

At Housemarque you can sign up for voluntary overtime hours, which go into an hour-bank which can later be used for vacation or gained as money. The maximum is 10 hours a week.

In a hypothetical crunch-situation, Tony would make it absolutely crystal clear what they are doing and why they are having crunch. He would make sure he would be there as long as the others were working. Listening to see if there's anything he could do to ease their workflow, such as getting them food, snacks, drinks, sauna, anything.

Juha:

Same as in other situations, removing obstacles but with the added responsibility of keeping an even sharper eye on the wellbeing of the team mates. The goal is not to wring the last bits of productivity from employees at their expense, and he would have them rest if they are looking worse for wear. In his opinion, there is no need to sit around just because of solidarity but it is important that there is someone who the team can approach when they have problems or need help.

12. *Speaking of schedules, how should a producer act when it comes to new features? Strict lines, adding a feature means removing another? No adding anything beyond a certain point?*

Milos:

Always be open to what people want to bring to the table, never make people feel like they can't bring their ideas up. Visualise the situation, for example, in time blocks. Help people find out what is more important. The fact is, there might not be enough time but if it's important, rethinking about it and finding a way to make adding it faster or maybe someone with downtime will be able to help to make it happen.

Always keep an open door for ideas.

Karoliina:

In her own teams she has had some wonderfully productive people, so if a new feature has appeared on the to-do list she will ask about it to stay up-to-date and to have an idea just how much time and resources these new features will require but, otherwise, she trusts her team 100%. As long as the original features are done before the deadline it gives them time to work on small additional features if they wish. This can be a boon for the game but also works as a great motivator: finish your workload beforehand and you can work on your own project.

Tony:

Depends on what stage of the project they are at. At the beginning it is easier to add things than at the end, but sometimes you can tell people that they can work overtime if they really want to add some feature.

Juha:

Originally the answer to this was no. Later on they adopted a so-called two-headed-eagle approach to work with this. This included the Executive Producer and the Creative Lead together deciding the fate of new features. If someone had an idea and they approached them in a determined manner, they would arrange a meeting with the two-headed-eagle and the employee and decide if the feature would make it or not. Every game project spawns new ideas all the time and at least 95% of these were killed right off the bat but, with this process, there were a handful of real gems that made it through.

For example, during one playtest they noticed that players had a lot of trouble finding their way through this game world. The original idea was that players would find their way by reading instructions in the world, signs and names and such, but there were too many "simple" players that did not think to do this so they ended up adding a map that the player can access at any time.

13. *How often do you end up doing something "that just has to be done"?
Getting screenshots / video / getting some material that is needed / order food / find people who are needed / act as a shield to the team?
In essence, how often do you have to do so called "extra work", so that your team(s) can concentrate on work?*

Milos:

That's the majority of his job. Being a producer is more about the project, less about the schedule, though junior producers tend to look at it less like this. The main job shouldn't be Jira, Hansoft, Excel, that's what you do when finishing. Most of the stuff is talking to people, playing the belt. Looking into tools should be 1/3 of the day.

If you look too much into the data, you forget the data is actually people.

Karoliina:

Not every day but at a minimum at least once a week. She does not find this to be a problem, and sees it as a positive thing as it gives her a chance to do something new and different every now and then.

Tony:

About once a fortnight he has to make sure that someone working overtime gets food in the evening or something similar. On top of that, there are weekly so-called "random extras" he has to take care of. He also acts as a living reminder, for example when the animator needs to reserve the motion cap-studio in two weeks, he will remind them to do so daily.

Juha:

The description of a producer's work is "ensure that the team can concentrate on their job", so none of the examples are really out of the norm. Sometimes it is about removing obstacles and sometimes about congratulating for good work. For example, Juha has gone out of the office to buy 100 pastries for the team when they overcame a big hurdle.

14. *Meetings and conferences, in your mind
a. What is their role?*

Milos:

For small teams, meetings are usually called when and where communication fails. People already have a tendency to talk and communicate in small teams so when this hits a

bump in the road, a meeting is needed to sort the situation out. As for big teams, it tends to be about keeping everyone on the same page and syncing up expectations. There are also different types of meetings. Problem solving meetings, for example, when trying to find a problem to fix it. To use the example from small teams, perhaps there's a lack of communication and you're trying to locate it and determine why. There are also brainstorming meetings where everyone can accumulate and give voice to their ideas.

Karoliina:

Is the often the instigator, as she sends the invites and facilitates/organises the meeting. All of this should come fairly naturally to a producer.

Tony:

Meetings are a very efficient way of sharing information in a clear way as well as a place where all can make their opinions heard.

Juha:

Efficient communication.

b. What is their danger?

Milos:

There are three big risks: people moving responsibilities to others, the fact that the meeting can drag on and take forever and, finally, that people are invited who don't need to be there, wasting their time.

Karoliina:

One danger is that meetings can become a moment of chatting. This is why it is important to keep the meetings relevant to the topic and those who want to chat can do so after the meeting as the rest get back to work.

Tony:

Too many. It is easy to get bogged down with meetings which will ultimately lead to lowered productivity. And if some topics are not gone through in a clear enough way, some people will be left trying to understand it after the meeting, spending more time on the issue and making the meeting essentially a waste of time.

Juha:

They can easily take up far too much time, especially if they are held unnecessarily. Doubly so if they include people who do not specifically need to be present.

c. What is the producer's role?

Milos:

Before meetings:

- Write down the articles/agenda of the meeting
 - Make sure people know and come prepared; the worst meetings are the ones where people come unprepared
- Write down the goal

During meetings:

- Keep it short
- Allow everyone the possibility to talk

- Especially important to do when senior and junior staff are in the same meeting; it's important to make sure that nobody feels like only the higher ups get to talk or make decisions

After Meetings:

- Followup
- Share the meeting notes
- Add what needs to be added to Jira

Karoliina:

Acts as the secretary taking notes during the meeting and, after, she sends the meeting notes to all who were present and/or those who will find them relevant. She also keeps in mind the continuity: thinking of when the next meeting needs to be held and what is needed for that, the material, who to invite, etc.

Tony:

There should not be a meeting without an agenda, so the organiser of the meeting ought to keep the agenda in focus. This is the producer approximately 70% of the time. Before, the role is to inform and invite all relevant people to the meeting and make the agenda available for all participants. During the meeting they should keep the focus on the topic at hand, to make sure the discussion does not get too off the rails and to ensure that everyone gets to speak up. Write down issues that come up but are not related to the topic at hand and make sure that this information is relayed to the people it affects. After the meeting, the producer should transcribe the notes and share them with the others who took part in the meeting, especially the action points of the meeting.

Juha:

Before

Make sure everyone is present.
Make sure there is an agenda.

During

Make sure you stay focused and the agenda is followed.
Write down meeting minutes.

After

Share the action points to the relevant people.
Share the meeting minutes if needed.

15. *Do you take part in the recruiting? How?*

Milos:

He is responsible for recruiting on the creative side, level designers, QA, production, etc. Important to check the personality, work ethic, etc. to match with the company. He conducted interviews personally.

Questions he asks are split into:

Personality match

- Why us / why the company?
- Why the role?
- Favourite game of all time?

Professional match

- Where do you see yourself in five years, a question ONLY asked from juniors, to see where they aim to go

Always have at least 15 minutes for questions from the interviewee

- The question that threw them most off, "Can you give me feedback on my answers?".
 - "I'd like feedback to develop my weaknesses"
- Their current 3D artist who back in the day came for interview, instead they sat for 45 minutes and just chatted, which helped him to notice that they fit the company -> instant hire

Karoliina:

She has not directly taken part in the recruiting process but has given her thoughts on what's important and what to keep an eye on to others doing recruiting. And, if her company has interns, they are all always under Karoliina, either by her own volition or the others in the team have guided them to her with "ask Karo / Karo can sort it out". Also, she will always prepare the team if they get someone new, be they new full time employees or interns.

Tony:

When the company is looking for new producers, Tony does not really take part in the interviews themselves but will go through the applicant's application to give his thoughts. Often he and other producers will have meetings and go through these applications together. He is also very often being approached through LinkedIn for internships, which he forwards to the relevant people.

Juha:

Depends on who is being recruited. If they are recruiting a producer into one of his teams or lead positions he is interested, but Junior positions are not worth the time.

He goes through the CVs and takes part in the interviews and the bigger the role they are looking for, the more he prepares for the interview. However, most questions he presents are not planned beforehand, but are more of the ad hoc variety.

If they are looking for a producer or a senior producer he will be asking about producing methods and how well they actually know them. He asks a lot of reactive questions, so if the interviewee is telling about something they have done, he will follow up with a lot of specific questions about it. He will also ask about how they work in hypothetical situations and see how they answer.

The majority of interviews do not result in hiring because at Remedy they are very, very careful and want to make sure that the people being recruited fit the company culture. That is not to say they never take small risks and give a trial period to someone they are not 100% certain of, and the majority of these cases have turned out positive experiences, but they do tend to be more cautious.

16. *What surprising/odd things have you ended up doing as a producer?*

Ended up in strange places, with strange people at strange times. In a sauna, butt naked, drinking with people from other continents, talking business with people who make

millions and millions. Ended up in a casino and Jaruska (his wife) had to bring him his passport as the place required it, and he didn't know how to play poker or blackjack or anything. A lot of learning was done.

Often these situations are about having to socialise with odd people in odd places.

Finishing and shipping Quantum break was another. The steps for that project were: Submission -> send a belt to Microsoft/Sony -> they will test the game in a very thorough manner -> if they say it's gold -> publish/release
So he was on a call with higher ups from Microsoft who praised Quantum as gold, ready to ship. He was in the room alone and asked to get a minute. He ran in circles for a while. Then ran to the CEO and hugged them and said they're good. Ran to Jaruska, gave them a kiss and said they're good. Then ran back to the room, ran in circles. The high ups saw it all on the webcam and many laughs were had.

Karoliina:

While she was working and writing her thesis, Karoliina decided to apply for the Ubisoft Graduate Program. She got through all the stages and was flown to Paris for interviews and remembers walking the streets of Paris wondering how being open to new turns, adventures, and asking, or being willing to ask, for things could lead her into such situations.

Tony:

Even as a new employee he was given a surprising amount of responsibility, at least, as long as he was proactive and asked for it. Now working in a bigger game company, he has ended up spending evenings with some big names within the industry and getting that "NOW I'm in the game industry"-feeling. When he was working with smaller teams he ended up making anything from websites to programming Discord-bots.

Juha:

When he had to mix the music for the soundtrack for a game at Rovio, without any sort of background in music.

17. *How has Corona affected your work?*

Milos:

First of thing that got affected was the number of calls they got. Important to talk to people, now has to call everyone when they need to talk. Went from 3-4 meetings a day to 8-12 meetings a day.

The biggest problem is that the calls become annoying things and issues that could normally be resolved when grabbing a cup of tea take more time. Checking on everyone on the way, chit chat, seeing how things are going, the calls go longer than expected. And he has to be the person who bothers people all the time. Finally, there is zero face time right now, which is really important to have.

Karoliina:

All the meetings, from dailies to SCRUM are held from home. She keeps even more an eye on the company Slack to see what is going on and if it makes sense to connect some people working on a similar issue. She has made sure that everyone has a camera when holding meetings because, otherwise, meetings get very impersonal.

Tony:

According to Tony, Housemarque had an incredibly painless transition, which was started a week before the government made their suggestions. Early on the biggest hurdle was that the company's VPN was under a lot more stress than it was originally meant for but, apart from that, not much changed. Phone calls and online meetings became more common but they still tend to be faster and stay more focused. He has to check on his team members more and makes sure to have at least one one on one talks with each of them a week, to see if they are okay as they are stuck at home.

Juha:

Every single meeting is done via Zoom and from home. All the face-to-face meetings are gone and the amount of phone calls have easily doubled or tripled. He is an Executive Producer so he does not need to see people as often but he knows that the producers of teams are under more pressure. Personally, he still went to the office to work because the rest of his family does not leave home so, this way, he could get some peace and quiet and seeing how there are only a handful of people around (instead of the normal 200+) it's working out okay for him.

Juha has heard that teams are having hardships with getting features forward at times as communication has suffered and, in general, it feels like everything needs a little bit more effort than before. That said, people adapt and learn fast, so he thinks that a considerable amount of their employees will continue working from home. This is also great news, as Remedy is constantly looking for more talented people but moving people to Finland is often difficult, so giving the option of working for Remedy from abroad might be the silver lining that comes out of this pandemic.

18. *Your own wise words about being a producer, the role of a producer or tips for aspiring producers?*

Understand the importance of your team. Be there for them. Don't shit your pants. Entertainment isn't "serious" business.

How to become a producer:

- Listen
- Learn
- Be humble
- Take the shittiest job in the game industry you can #QA
- Don't say you're a producer before you've finished at least one commercial project

When starting a new company, why in Finland? Partially the government, they take care of devs. The dev culture, IGDA, and all that.

Only focus on small things, not the whole or, as he says, "focus on the next meal". Break the whole into small parts and focus on each part.

Karoliina:

As long as you dare to speak and ask you can end up wherever. She dared to tell her professors that she wanted to work in the game industry and, from that, got to work at

Metropolia Game Studio. She dared to speak up at a meeting that she could and wanted to write and became a narrative designer and later a screenwriter from that. In the beginning, everyone on her team assumed that the producer knows everything about everything and she wishes she would have dared to say more when she did not know (and that she would like to be informed about it). Others should know that producers, even if they are jack-of-all-trades professionals, are still only human and can not be in the know regarding everything.

Tony:

Go and network, that is honestly how you get the jobs. Any and all experience is useful. Keep on keepin' on.

Juha:

Bug triage is paramount. Towards the end of the project fixing a small bug, more often than not, leads to another bigger bug. Not worth it. As an example he says that a week before a game was about to be shipped, they found out a problem with the Turkish subtitles. The options were:

- Ship the game with the problem
- Fix the problem and possibly break the whole subtitle feature, miss the release day, and, finally, release several months later, missing the window of time you had spent your whole marketing effort on and lose millions

So do not rock the boat towards the end.